SUCCESS

Diane Redmond

As the train pulled into Cambridge station David was there waiting for her. She saw him before he saw her, his hair was golden in the sunshine as he eagerly peered up the track at the oncoming train. She'd been standing excitedly by the open window but the sight of him suddenly intimidated her. Lucius's face floated before her eyes and panic engulfed her. Maybe she'd been too impetuous, perhaps this visit wasn't such a good idea after all? Suddenly the door flew open and David was standing there.

'Jude!'

She stared up at him and smiled with relief. How could she have forgotten his sweet spontaneity? Hadn't he released her that day on Haworth Moor?

Diane Redmond is a prolific broadcaster, television script writer and playwright. She has over forty children's books in print, from story books to teenage novels. Her plays have been staged in Cambridge and London before touring England and showing at the Edinburgh Festival. This is her first adult novel.

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For my husband, Jon, who never, ever doubted it

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Chapter One

Stumbling through the rain, in the teeth of a biting wind, Jude smiled up at an iron-grey sky and was suddenly savagely happy. She'd known all along that she'd feel better here, up on the rolling, empty moors, but for all that had never managed to brave the journey before. Now she'd done it and Lucius Frederick Arthur Fabian Carmichael was exorcised.

November had seen another story unfolding. On a soft, golden day, dizzy with skylarks, they'd walked the lonely moors, hardly able to keep their hands off each other. But Jude's passion had turned to panic as he drove her to Abbey Park on the crest of the Haworth Moors.

'Are they expecting us?' she'd asked as they zipped through the ancestral gates to his family's stately home.

'Absolutely not,' he'd laughed.

She gasped as the drive gave way to rolling parkland and the house burst upon her, a magnificent Jacobean mansion of weathered Yorkshire stone. Grandeur she'd expected, but not grace and beauty like this.

'Is this all yours?' she'd marvelled as they cruised along a drive winding through acres of rich pastureland.

'If only it were. I'd flog the lot to the first developer and leg it to South America!'

'I don't believe you,' she laughed.

'You'd better,' he answered, taking a sharp bend without slowing, narrowly missing a noisy queue mobbing an ice-cream van. Jude turned her head to stare.

'Sorry about the riff-raff. Tuesdays and Saturdays we're

open to Joe Public, keen to know how many bog-rolls the aristocracy get through in a week.'

'Arrogant bastard!'

'I know,' he murmured, gently slipping his hand between her warm, firm thighs. 'Isn't it a turn on?'

Much as she wanted to disagree Jude couldn't argue. The soft thrust of his fingers sent her wild with desire. Restraining the impulse to put her head in his lap and set him aflame too, she caressed the taut muscular curve of his thighs and smiled. It was shamefully true – their political polarity was the most delicious turn-on. Jude, the daughter of a sheep-farmer in the Lake District and a paid-up member of the Labour Party, had in theory no time for Little Lord Fauntleroy, born with not one but several silver spoons in his mouth. But so much for theory. When it came to the sizzling reality of his touch, his kiss, and the animal power of his wholly aristocratic body, politics melted like ice in heat.

'Bloody socialists,' he muttered, raking her body with his teasing eyes. 'Your lot would confiscate my land and open a residential home for gay lunatics!'

'And you'd swop it for a theme park. That's very impressive.'

'Very. I'd make a million!'

Banging on the brakes of his Golf GTI he whooshed her out of the car and into his arms. 'Kiss me, you sexy little revolutionary!' Jude willingly did as she was told. 'Now let's really give those pain-in-the-arse plebs something to gawp at.' Holding her tight, he swept a practised hand over her breasts.

'Lucius!'

'Don't be so provincial,' he teased, and taking her hand, led her up the flight of steps to the enormous front door emblazoned with his family crest.

'"He who wants shall have",' he said, translating the Latin text intertwined around a charging black knight. 'I've always taken that quite literally.'

'I've noticed.'

To Jude's surprise the door opened without their either knocking or ringing.

'Sissons,' said Lucius as a po-faced butler ushered them in, 'have we missed tea?'

'I'm afraid so, sir.'

'Rustle up Cook, old man, tell her we're starving. Lots of sandwiches and as much cake as she can manage.'

Sniffing mournfully, Sissons disappeared down some back stairs.

'Is he always like that?' Jude whispered.

'Only when I'm around,' Lucius answered, and taking her arm, walked her briskly down a magnificent hall hung with oil paintings in old gold frames and into a huge drawing room overlooking glorious gardens. 'Welcome to Abbey Park!'

Jude wondered why on earth he'd brought her here. She'd only to mention his parents and he went mad. Why bring her to the house to meet them? Hoping he wouldn't pull any dirty tricks on her, she followed him nervously. To her astonishment Lord and Lady Stokes rose graciously from the depths of a silk damask-covered sofa to greet them.

'Darling,' said Lady Stokes, extending a cheek to be dutifully pecked by her wayward son. 'What a lovely surprise.'

'Meet Jude,' he said. 'She wants to turn the house into a municipal museum!'

'Funny, I've often had that thought myself,' said Lord Stokes. 'Though I've recently considered the university Veterinary School too. I'm told they're looking for larger premises.'

Jude smiled gratefully at him. She'd formally met Lord Stokes on several occasions, in his official capacity as Vice Chancellor of Leeds University. As student rep on the university's governing body, she'd grown to respect his principles and integrity. He was one of the foremost promoters of the arts in the North of England, and surprisingly radical given his background; a man she both admired and

respected. His son and heir was far from being a chip off the ancestral block. Looking from father to son, Jude could see the family resemblance. Both were handsome, distinguished men with that indefinable air of assurance that comes from generations of inherited wealth, but Jude knew, even in her besotted state, that Lucius lacked both his father's principles and his humanity.

Sissons appeared with a trolley laden with crumpets, cakes and China tea.

'Well done!' Lucius cried, taking a handful of sandwiches and a chocolate eclair as the trolley cruised past him. 'How are you, Sissons, and your lady wife?'

'As well as can be expected,' answered the butler, and shuffled lugubriously out of the room.

Lucius waited for the heavy doors to close behind Sissons before exploding into laughter.

'You should have put him away half a century ago!'

'Lucius! We're quite devoted to Sissons.'

'Unfortunately.' He stuffed a crumpet into his mouth and wiped butter off his lips with a lace-edged napkin. 'Ma, believe me, he's a miserable old git!'

Clucking with disapproval, Lady Stokes poured tea for all. Jude noticed the perfect china tea cups they drank from were as pretty and cherished as Lady Stokes herself, with her clear English rose complexion and soft Cashmere clothes. She hardly took her eyes off her only son whom she clearly adored, though he constantly shocked her true blue soul.

'So, Lucius, how are you?' asked Lord Stokes.

'Me? Oh, fine.' Lucius reached out for more tea. 'You'll be delighted to know that Jude is a socialist and loves Shakespeare. You can pick her pretty brains and leave me in peace for a change.'

'Jude and I have met before, and I'd say her brains were sharp rather than pretty.'

Lucius looked put out.

'You never told me you'd met?'

'I never got the chance,' she laughed. 'Anyway, I thought you'd know.'

'Know what?'

'That I'd met your father on the governing body,' she explained. 'I am student rep,' she added, just in case he'd forgotten.

'Oh, that boring old shit.'

The atmosphere grew heavy. He'd hoped to impress his father with his girlfriend's hot-bed combination of sex and politics. The fact that he already knew *and* respected her took the wind right out of Lucius's sails and made him childishly peevish.

'Got any booze?' he snapped.

'Sherry, darling?' murmured Lady Stokes, heading for the drinks cabinet.

'Whisky.'

'Aren't you driving?'

'Christ almighty, Ma, I'm only talking about a slug of the stuff.'

Jude could see the situation turning sour and quickly took action. Leaving Lord Stokes, whose expression had turned tense and disapproving, she settled herself beside Lucius on the sofa and pointed to several photographs dotted along the white marble fireplace.

'Is that you?' she whispered.

He grunted and quickly swallowed down his whisky.

'He was such a sweet little boy,' enthused Lady Stokes, handing Jude a heavy silver frame with a photograph of a laughing Lucius inside.

The mood lightened. Lucius smiled as he recalled funny family stories, Lady Stokes beamed with affection. Only Lord Stokes sat removed and alone. It was clear to Jude that an old power game had been played out and won by Lucius who was now happy while his father sat excluded. Jude wondered if Lucius had become so outrageous because he couldn't bear the reality of not being able to match up to

his father? His boorish manners provided an effective smoke screen and probably hid some deep-rooted sense of failure. She smiled to herself. A month ago she'd have laughed in the face of anybody who'd put forward such a generous theory on the psychology of Lucius Carmichael. Now here she was dreaming one up for herself.

Lucius rose and stretched. The sight of his warm, tanned chest and the strong column of his neck instantly took Jude's mind off anything but pleasure.

'Gotta go,' he said, pulling her carelessly towards him. 'She's got a dissertation to finish!'

Laughing at his obvious lie, they made their farewells and left.

'Thank Christ for a quick getaway,' he grunted as he swung himself into the car.

'Come on, they're nice,' she enthused.

He instantly pressed his mouth against hers, pushing open her lips and circling her tongue with his. 'Say one more word in praise of my father and I'll fuck you on the spot.'

'He's such a good, good man,' she murmured, temptingly pressing her hips against his.

'Right, that's it, you're going to get it!' he threatened.

'What, here, right outside the front door?'

'No, somewhere less restricting.'

Turning on the engine he roared down the drive and out of the gates as if every demon in hell were at his heels.

As they drove back to Leeds, over misty moors eerie with the call of the curlew, Jude leaned against him and sighed. How had two such unlikely people, from opposite ends of the social and political spectrum, ever fallen into each other's arms?

The minute she'd first set eyes on Lucius, two years ago almost to the day, she had taken an instant and firm dislike to him. Titled, loaded and charming, he embodied everything Jude despised.

'Isn't he gorgeous?' drooled the girls in her English seminar

group which Lucius occasionally attended, yawning elaborately all the way through.

'Yes, if you like fascists,' she'd answered dismissively. Tall, with a muscular, worked out physique, he had a soft, all-year tan that suggested luxury hide-aways in Antigua. He'd been blessed with a perfect face: high, aristocratic cheekbones, firm chin and mouth, perfect nose and dark blue eyes that flashed irritability and impatience. But Jude took his good looks in her stride. A beautiful woman herself, she was unlikely to be overawed by beauty in others, nevertheless she had to admit, if only to herself, that occasionally his hair unnerved her. It would have made sense if he'd worn it short and spiky, reflecting his moodiness, but instead he chose a romantic style that occasionally belied his boorish manners. Long, dark and silky, it grew into the nape of his neck and swept across his face, highlighting the darkness of his eyes and the purity of his beautiful bone structure. It lent him an occasional softness that disarmed and intrigued her. Sometimes she'd find herself studying him during a lecture, wondering how a man born with such natural grace could have so brutalised himself. He thrived on his unpleasant reputation, and made no secret of his loathing for left-wing politics, commoners, and all student activities. So why, *why* had he ever taken a fancy to Jude?

'Your lovely arse,' he'd explained later, with his hand on it. 'Firm and shapely, like a well-trained horse!'

Jude laughed at his description and dismissed the explanation. Like all beautiful women she had grown up taking her good looks for granted, and was unaware of the dynamic effect of her brains and beauty combined. In this she was radiantly unforgettable – but Lucius Carmichael never mixed politics with pleasure and Jude Summers, active member of the student union, President of the Debating Society and Chairperson of the Labour Party, was not his kind of woman. He liked them beautiful but biddable; she was beautiful but voluble. Then suddenly, just as their third and final year

started, after two years of disapproving of each other, he'd stopped her in the main corridor of the English faculty.

'Feel like a coffee after all that hot air on *Twelfth Night?*'

'*Me!*' she'd gasped, quickly glancing over her shoulder to see if he was talking to somebody else.

'Yes, *you*,' he answered, gently stressing the word as if she were suddenly precious to him.

Jude shook her head, too surprised to speak, but Lucius wasn't a man to hesitate. Taking her by the arm, he steered her into the common room. Jude's heart sank. Would any of her friends see her with him? Luckily the room was empty. While he fiddled about with the temperamental drinks machine, she wondered if he was confusing her with somebody else.

'Bloody coffee machine,' he growled, walking towards her with two scalding hot plastic cups. 'All I've managed is pea soup!'

Speechless, she sipped it, wondering what on earth they'd have to say to each other. Lucius kicked off with a novel line.

'You suddenly seem different.'

Jude put down her soup and decided it was time to put him straight.

'No. I've always been me, Jude Summers.'

She paused. He smiled.

'Student rep, Labour Party, Debating Society,' she gleefully listed all his pet hates. 'Remember, you don't approve of me? You don't *like* me!' she added with relish.

'I do now,' he murmured as his eyes swept over her body.

'That's odd,' she scoffed. 'Suddenly, after two years, I'm irresistible?'

'It seems perfectly natural to me, Jude.'

He said her name so softly it sounded foreign to her ears. Unwittingly her pulse skipped a beat. Damn him. Had he slipped something into her soup?

'Let's have dinner tonight.'

'No!' she snapped, and walked off.

A week later he asked again. This time the invitation was not even a question and he certainly never waited for her answer.

A break in the tumbling rain cloud gave Jude a brief respite. Stopping she turned around to get her bearings. Bradford and Leeds lay way, way below, washed by cloud and bands of rain sweeping down the long valley. She was on top of a ridge of hills, with the Pennines bearing down behind her. Taking a deep breath she braced herself and turned into the wind that whistled over a break in the rocky skyline. Still smiling she struck out for Wuthering Heights.

Lucius turned up at her flat at eight, in the pouring rain. She'd wondered all afternoon if he'd come, doubting yet anticipating. By four o'clock she gave up on her Shakespeare essay and ran a hot bath. Sighing, she slipped into the perfumed warmth and tried to forget him. Just as she started to relax there was a bang on the bathroom door.

'Go away!'

'No. It's Nell. Let me in!'

'Nell?' Jude smiled. 'You've got a cheek!'

Nell was Jude's best friend. They'd met on their first day at Leeds University. Nell had been campaigning for a night bus for women on the student campus. The first thing she'd said to Jude was, 'Sign this!' and Jude had.

'Bloody pushy woman,' grumbled her dad, staggering under the weight of Jude's trunk. 'I thought you were here to study, not gallivant round Leeds city centre every night?'

Blushing, Jude circumnavigated the campaigning women but half an hour later bumped into Nell again and discovered they were next door neighbours in the high rise, student residential block.

'Hi!' said Nell, with a warm smile. 'Fancy a cuppa?'

'Nice girl,' Jude's dad remarked, instantly forgetting his prejudice at the invitation.

Over tea and toast they discovered Nell was from Bolton, her dad was redundant, her mum was training to be an aromatherapist, and Nell herself was a first-year Sociology student.

'Bloody funny family, if you ask me,' muttered Jude's dad when Nell nipped out to make more toast in the corridor kitchen.

'Shhhh!' hissed Jude.

It was a relief to wave him off, back to the peace of his hill farm outside Keswick.

'Give me sheep any day,' he'd said as he drove away nodding towards a group of students with long dyed hair.

'BYE!' Jude yelled, and turning her back on the disappearing Ford transit van, smiled up at Baydock Hall of Residence. 'Now for some fun!' she said out loud, and with a wide smile on her face ran up the three flights of stairs to Nell's room where stewed tea and cold toast were sweeter than nectar and ambrosia.

Remembering, Jude scrambled out of the bath and splashed across the cold floor to open the door.

'I just *had* to find out if it was true about you and Lucius Carmichael?' gasped Nell, bursting into the bathroom and facing Jude like a virago.

'*What?*' she cried, slipping back into the bath and playing for time under the fast-disappearing bubbles. 'Who told you?'

'Oh, my God – it *is* true!' groaned Nell, slumping on to the floor, a picture of tragedy.

'Before you open your veins, he bought me a coffee – no, a pea soup – a week ago.'

Though outwardly light hearted, Jude was in fact extremely uncomfortable. She and Nell had shared the same contempt for Lucius and all the barking Hooray Henries who trailed in his wake.

'DID he ask you out or not?' Nell demanded, characteristically straight.

'I'm not sure . . .'

Nell threw the nailbrush into the water.

'You're bloody well lying!' she fumed. Seeing Jude's blushing face, she softened. 'Come on, our kid, you're not going to do a dumb thing like that?'

Jude slipped down into the water and let her hair wash over her face like a net.

'Nell, he won't turn up, I promise you.'

She was quite wrong. He did turn up, in the pouring rain with a dozen red roses.

'Fancy a walk into town?' he said, twirling an enormous umbrella as bright as a yo-yo.

Feeling ridiculously happy and trying to ignore Nell's glowering face at the window, Jude joined him under the umbrella and immediately regretted her black suede shoes and smart frock. Lucius looked elegantly easy in thick cords, striped shirt and a stylish raincoat. She looked like an awkward secretary at her first interview, though Lucius clearly didn't think so.

'You look beautiful,' he murmured into her hair.

As they walked down the hill into town, the rain pitter-pattered on his umbrella and the gutters bubbled torrents under their feet. Pressed against him, Jude could smell his skin overlaid by the tang of limes that smacked of chic barbers in Jermyn Street. The smell of his wealth made her pull away, suddenly self-conscious. Lost for words, she said the one thing he didn't want to hear.

'How's your father?'

Lucius stopped dead in his tracks and stared at her.

'Is this a television interview or something?'

'No, not at all,' she answered awkwardly.

'You sound like some wanker off This is Your Life,' he mocked. 'How's your father? Tell me about your wonderful childhood. *Shit*!'

'I'm sorry.'

Turning angrily, he saw Jude's beautiful face suddenly tense and pulled her quickly to him, kissing her open mouth with urgent intensity. The umbrella fell to the ground and the rain splashed on to her hair but he didn't let go. Neither did she. With stars bursting in her brain and her feet inches off the ground, Lord Stokes the great northern philanthropist was no longer of the slightest interest to her.

'Don't talk about my family,' he growled. 'Talk about me.'

'What about you?' she asked, dazed, as his lips pulled away from hers.

'How rich I'm going to be, that'll do for starters.'

'OK, tell me,' she asked weakly.

'As rich as half a dozen Californian vineyards.'

'Sounds modest for a man who already owns most of Yorkshire.'

'You're not impressed?'

'I'm not interested by your money,' she said, slowly coming down to earth after the impact of his kisses. 'Or anybody else's, really.'

'Good! I like a woman who's not after my dosh,' he replied cheerfully, putting his arm through hers. 'Then I can only presume you're after my body?'

The way she was tingling at his touch, Jude knew she was totally after his body, but she certainly wasn't going to tell him that.

'So, you want me to talk about Californian vineyards and not your charming father?'

He nodded.

'Why?' she asked playfully.

'They're my passport to freedom - megabucks – away from all this crap.' He jabbed his umbrella towards Leeds city centre, lit up rather prettily in the rain, Jude thought. 'Come on,' he said, holding her tight. 'Bore me with your ancestral relations.'

'It won't take long. We don't go down the ages like you Carmichaels.'

'Tell me,' he urged.

'I come from Cumberland where my father rents a sheep- farm from the National Trust. We live just outside Keswick . .' She broke off and laughed at the look of undiluted horror on Lucius's face.

'*Sheep*!' he cried.

The rest was whipped away by the gust of wind that sent the umbrella spinning down the hill into the city centre.

Bistro di Cesare was warm and smelt of fresh herbs and crushed garlic. Their candlelit table was in a quiet corner overhung with trailing vines and jasmine.

'We'll have a bottle of Barolo,' said Lucius, his eyes running down the two foot menu. 'What would you like to eat, Jude?'

'Antipasti and saltimbocca.'

'Plus patate fritte and insalata mista. *Va bene, cara mia*?'

'*Perfetto*,' she laughed, catching the fizz of his mood. 'You obviously know your way round the menu.'

'The manager's a friend and generous with the credit. Here, have a bread stick.'

Jude nibbled grissini while he filled up their glasses.

'*Salute*,' he said, and watched her drink over the rim of his glass. 'The fells explain it.'

'What?'

'Your beauty. It comes from clean air and soft rain.'

'I sound like an advert for mineral water!'

He ignored her joke and carried on staring at her face, glowing in the candlelight.

'Your skin's perfect and that hair . . .' He lifted a handful and watched it fall through his fingertips. 'It's superb. You must look glorious striding over the fells. Wordsworth would have written love poems just for you.'

'I know you've been skipping lectures for months,' Jude

reminded him, 'but Wordsworth died a hundred and fifty years before I was born!'

Lucius reached across the table and lightly caught her chin in his hand.

'Eyes as pale as rain,' he murmured, and leaning forward he kissed her mouth, gently pushing her lips open with his warm, eager tongue. 'You taste sweet too.'

'*Scusi, Signorina?*'

Jude jumped sky-high.

'Antipasti,' said the waiter, setting down her first course with an accomplished flourish.

Without a flicker of embarrassment, Lucius neatly re-arranged Jude's hair on her shoulders and calmly turned his attention to the olives and prosciutto piled on his plate.

'Wonderful. Let's eat!'

Jude suddenly wasn't hungry anymore. She had spent years stone-walling this man and here she was, weak with desire, principles blown out of the window as she hung on his every word. All she wanted was to look at him, watch the way he held his glass and broke the bread, his sharp, white teeth nibbling round an olive and his hands cradling the silver cutlery. She wanted to be all the beautiful things he said she was, and most of all she wanted him to kiss her again. She kept her eyes firmly on her plate so that he wouldn't see the yearning in them. Suddenly his words shattered her reverie.

'. . . virgins, like you . . .'

'What like me?'

'Virgins.'

Jude's eyes widened. 'What makes you so sure I'm a virgin?'

'Instinct.'

She laughed but reluctantly. Did he think she was a dry academic blue-stocking? According to campus gossip, Lucius Carmichael had had hundreds of affairs. She couldn't rival that, and neither did she want to, but she'd had a few and was

certainly no virgin. Sex, sadly, had been a big disappointment so far. Nothing like what Nell and all her friends had described in such glorious, graphic detail. Even Tom, the postgrad she'd been dating for several months now, left her unsatisfied. He had the body of an angel, the mind of a genius, but couldn't figure out what to do once they were between the sheets. The earth hadn't moved, probably because he held her too tight and she'd always been more irritated than turned on by his clumsy love-making. Frustrated almost to screaming point, she'd taken the proverbial bull by the horns and *shown* him what to do. Since then things had been a lot better but it wasn't an inspired relationship.

Unfortunately Lucius was right, though she'd die rather than admit it. Some secret part of her remained untouched. Not technically virginal, but never really turned on.

The meal was long and easy. As they walked out into the quiet streets the night air washed over them, cool and clear, whipping up the last spatterings of rain and crystallising a sky trembling with stars. All too soon they were standing on her front doorstep with romance fading fast.

'Come for a drive next week?' he'd whispered into her hair.

'Yes!' she'd murmured, her heart leaping with happiness. And that's when she'd first gone to Abbey Park.

As she reached the high Pennine ridge lightning zig-zagged on the horizon. The storm was heading straight for her. Putting a spurt on Jude covered ground fast, hoping to find cover before it broke overhead. As her feet slithered over rank smelling, saturated ground she wondered for the umpteenth time what devil had possessed him to take her to Abbey Park. Thunder growled as she recalled how he hated her to talk about his family and yet he'd taken her home to meet them. Was this the real Lucius that she'd glimpsed briefly behind the boorish smoke screen? The boy who'd failed to live up to his father's image but was still clumsily

trying to please him. Whatever his motivation it had failed miserably.

As they'd driven back to Leeds after that visit his high spirits had disappeared. He turned dark and morose, dropping her at the flat with hardly a backward glance. Feeling bitterly disappointed, Jude slumped on the sofa and stared angrily at the television. Why had she gone against her instincts and her better judgement? The man was trouble and she'd always known it. Best to walk out of his life right now, while she still had some dignity left to her.

She saw him once in the weeks that followed, lounging against the notice board in the English faculty common room. It was easy to avoid him and gave her pleasure to do so. She felt back to normal and in control again. Then she received an invitation from Lord and Lady Stokes. In elaborate script on a creamy embossed card they cordially invited Jude to a ball to celebrate their son's twenty-first birthday, aptly on the 21 December.

Jude's first instinct was to refuse. He'd be there with the Honourable Flavia Dingbat-Major on one arm and a sleek Sloane model on the other. She'd be one of the eccentric intellectuals with no dress sense but lots of *brains*! Just thinking about it made Jude cringe. No way was she swelling the ranks of that lot. Anyway, she'd nothing to wear. Then Nell surprised her by saying several of her friends were going, and offering to lend Jude her own green taffeta ballgown. It wasn't the stuff that dreams were made of but it would do, especially if she were to form part of the frumpy intellectual brigade. Feeling more curious than elated, Jude accepted the invitation and immediately regretted it. By the end of term, a week before the ball, she wanted to go home. Why hang about in Leeds when she could be up on the frosty fells, helping her dad with the early lambing? It wasn't as if Lucius *wanted* her to go. She was probably there at Lord Stokes's invitation, as a representative of the student union. In order to make herself even more miserable and to firm

up her decision not to go, she tried on Nell's green taffeta. It looked awful!

'You look like a maypole!' laughed Nell.

'That's it – I'm not going!'

Throwing the dress at Nell, she stormed into her bedroom, and burst into tears. When the doorbell rang she ignored it and carried on weeping like a child in a bad temper.

'I'll get it!' called Nell, sarcastically.

A few minutes later she walked into Jude's room carrying a very large box.

'For you,' she said, astonished.

'*Me*!'

'Well, it's got your name on it and it was hand delivered.'

Jude stared at the huge box wrapped around in crinkly white tissue paper and tied with yards of the palest pink ribbon. Trembling, she unpeeled the paper.

'wow! It's from Chloe!' gasped Nell.

Jude held her breath as her hand touched cool silk.

'I don't believe it!' she murmured as she lifted out a breath- taking ballgown.

She'd seen it in Chloe's, the most expensive women's shop in town. Draped around a Greek urn it had demanded her attention and laid claim to her fantasies. There was nothing so common as a price tag to be seen anywhere near it. Jude had walked into the shop and asked the affected assistant (trying to disguise a strong Mancunian accent, he'd told Jude it was four hundred and fifty pounds. A strap, he'd implied with a snooty sniff. It had in fact been, beyond the dreams of avarice but now here it was, the stuff of dreams, pressed against Jude's trembling body. She gazed into the mirror lost in admiration. The rouged skin of her shoulders shone like pearls, and the fitted bodice clung seductively to every curve it touched. The delicate boning was cut low and square at the front and plunged deep at the back. The full skirt swirled over her flat stomach, and every step it made whirled away into a dark, glamorous, sophisticated world.

'Who's it from?' demanded Nell, riffling through the tissue paper for a card.

Jude didn't have to look, she knew.

'Here!' cried Nell, thrusting an envelope into her hand. Jude slipped open the seal, her heart beating so loud the dress fluttered against her breast.

"'I've arranged for somebody to pick you up at nine,'" she read out loud. "'PS. Can't wait to hold you in this gorgeous thing. Lucius.'"

Nell fell dramatically on to Jude's bed.

'Dear God! He'll want his pound of flesh.' Suddenly she shot up like a jack-in-the-box. 'Jesus! Better make sure it fits, otherwise it's back to the green taffeta.'

'It must fit me – it's *got* to fit,' panicked Jude. Standing naked, she gently slipped the dress over her head. It was perfect, sensuously hugging her hips and lovely breasts.

'For a man with no brain, he's got taste,' conceded Nell. Jude's face was radiant with joy.

'Oh, Nell . . . it's wonderful!'

'You're wonderful,' said her friend. 'Just don't let Carmichael forget it.'

'Please, Nell,' Jude begged, her face glowing with joy. 'Let me be happy.'

'Be happy, love. I just hope the bastard's good to you.'

Jude hugged her dress and smiled.

'He's very good to me.'

She stepped out of the chauffeur-driven car Lucius had sent for her into a winter garden fragrant with perfume.

'Thank you,' she said to the driver who nodded curtly and roared off.

Jude looked around and wondered where to go first. The house was lit up with a hundred candles and the grounds were illuminated with strings of fairy lights. There was a huge pink marquee on the velvet lawn and from it poured crowds of laughing people, their feet protected from the cold earth by a

red carpet that ran across the lawn, up the stone steps of the terrace and into the ballroom. Music pounded the night sky and the intense fragrance of hot house blossoms saturated her senses. The atmosphere, electric and romantic, hit Jude like a drug. Excitement bubbled inside her as she skipped up the steps to the carved front door.

Elaborately dressed footmen proffered trays of clinking champagne glasses. Jude smiled and scooped up a glass then swept on into the beautiful Jacobean ballroom. As she walked, sipping the wine, tiny bubbles burst in her mouth and nose. It was glorious being there, knowing Lucius was only a room or two away from her. She wandered through the house, enjoying the music, the soft candlelight and the throng of beautiful people.

In the dining room she gasped at the sight of the buffet. Here, in an English winter, there were fruits of summer: strawberries, cherries, melons, peaches and nectarines, heaped in silver dishes, dripping grapes and dates and figs. There were hams, smoked ducks, turkey and beef, trout in aspic, salmon, lobster, crab and prawns. Delicious salads, twists of bread, cheeses from all over Europe, and table after table of the most delicious desserts – syllabub, crême caramel, chantilly laced trifles, strawberry milles feuilles, chocolate mousses, champagne sorbets and delicately coloured ice-creams. Jude's eyes feasted on the opulence but she knew she couldn't eat a thing. Her senses were sated with pleasure. It was enough simply to stand and stare, drinking in every detail so that she could forever hold the memory of this moment.

A crowd of Lucius's friends from the university broke in on her reverie, urging her to join them. Usually she wouldn't have exchanged the time of day with them but tonight was different. She smiled and followed them into the ballroom where disco lights flashed incongruously around the fine Jacobean mouldings and gilded the carved angels on the timbered ceiling. As the music grew louder more dancers

surged on to the floor, swaying and laughing against each other. Jude slipped from one partner to another, dancing wildly, sensuously, her eyes sparkling with pleasure and anticipation. She loved everybody that night, but there was only one person she wanted. Pressing bodies, smiling faces, caressing hands, all heightened her excitement as she searched the crowd for Lucius. Suddenly she knew he was near. She couldn't see him but her senses were alive to him, he was close, all she had to do was wait.

As she chatted with her partner, her skin prickled. She shuddered with a delicious spasm of excitement and turned slowly. Standing in the dark, carved doorway, with the garden behind him, stood Lucius. He'd been watching her and she knew that he liked what he saw.

He raised his glass to his lips, smiled over the rim and drained it. He'd bought the Chloe dress on an impulse, never dreaming that she'd look so devastatingly sexy in it. It amused him to think he'd managed successfully to dislike this woman for so long. Had he been blind? Or was he turned off by her politics and the ball-breaking intellectuals she hung out with? If it hadn't been for the Godawful lecture on *Twelfth Night* at the beginning of term Jude Summers might have slipped through his net.

He'd been sitting in the lecture hall, nursing a hangover, when a shaft of cold light fell across Jude and set her glorious golden hair ablaze. Rivetted, he'd stared at the pale cream of her flawless skin, at her strong jaw and slim neck, and then she'd turned, almost in slow motion, and looked at him. He couldn't work out whether his hangover was playing tricks on him or if she really had moved so slowly and deliberately. Across the arc of light their eyes locked, hers silver-grey, magically clear, his a dark and flashing blue. It was she who dropped her gaze first, turning away from him, her head down as if she were embarrassed. But in that moment he knew her, almost as if he'd entered her. She had a virginal, untouched quality, as if no man had penetrated the depths of her and set

her alight. Time and a little romance would do the trick, and he was just the one to do it. No rush, though, she wasn't the hearty, county sort who liked it rough and ready. He could wait, especially with such rich pickings as his reward.

Not for a second did he doubt his ability to seduce Jude. Women adored him, had done since he was a fourteen year-old Etonian. Jude would fall like all the rest, when she was ripe for love. He hadn't been surprised by her initial refusal, that was par for the course. Anyway, rejection was a novel experience for him and a bit of a turn on. His big mistake had been taking her back to the Abbey to meet his parents. Seeing her alongside his father, so bloody politically right on, had bugged him badly. The prospect of a good fuck was one thing but her ingratiating herself with his father had not pleased him. His ardour cooled as he drove her home. He'd dumped her as quickly as possible then headed for his favourite wine bar where two bottles of champagne and the favours of the ever-ready Olivia soon made him feel like a bad boy again.

He probably wouldn't have given Jude another thought if she hadn't avoided him in the English faculty. He'd taken it as a challenge and out of curiosity added her to his invitation list. He'd been unexpectedly pleased when she had accepted – and then he'd done something totally uncharacteristic. Passing Chloe's one day he'd seen the dress in the window and out of his subconscious Jude had risen like a naked Venus. The dress perfectly mirrored her luscious, golden body. Without a moment's hesitation he'd walked into the shop and bought it. Now, watching Jude, he smiled, mesmerised by the shimmer of silk which spilled from her full breasts to her curving hips. He refilled his glass. He would have her before the night was out.

The storm broke with a spectacular zig-zag of light followed by a crash so loud Jude broke into a startled run. Striking out across the open moor her legs quickly adjusted to the springy heather as her body took up its own rhythm and her thoughts

flew free. As the rain hissed down she recalled the final act of that gaudy night with Lucius.

What Jude best remembered was his touch, though in reality he'd hardly touched her all night. There were toasts and speeches, followed by presents and more speeches, then Lucius seemed to dance with everybody everybody but Jude. It didn't matter. Wherever he was, whoever he was with, she felt his eyes on her, sweeping down the length of her body, making her shiver with anticipation. When finally he touched her, he claimed her. He kissed her full on the mouth, his tongue warm against hers. Laying his hand on the small of her back, he caressed its warm hollow as he chatted to his guests. A sea of people in a rainbow of colours sparkled before them, a vivid backdrop to the night. Only one person stood out as an individual: Jacob Lorimer.

'My godfather!' beamed Lucius, his manner subtly altering as deferentially he introduced a tanned, handsome, grey-haired man to Jude. Jacob took her hand and kissed it. Jude didn't like him at all.

'Beautiful,' he murmured, and winked at Lucius. 'Perfect choice, son.'

They smiled at each other conspiratorially. Lucius liked the man, liked his money, and especially liked his American ease.

'Great party,' added Jacob, and throwing an arm around Lucius's shoulders: 'Got a little something for you myself.'

Lucius's eyes lit up.

'It can wait,' smiled Jacob. 'Have fun with your lovely lady and we'll talk business over breakfast, yeah?'

Lucius nodded and watched him wander confidently into the crowd.

'I reckon he's going to hand over the vineyards,' he whispered, suddenly tense with excitement.

'What'll you do with them?' Jude laughed flippantly.

'Get the fuck out of England!'

An icy shiver ran down her spine. Leave England, now, when she was so in love? She shook herself. Of course he wouldn't, not now anyway. He'd finish his final year and get his degree, a third perhaps but who cared? As long as he was around, near her, that's all that mattered.

'Come on,' said Lucius, leading her on to the dance floor. The air around them was electric. People stopped and stared, stunned by their beauty. As they danced Lucius lifted her warm, perfumed hair off her shoulders and blew gently on to her throat, softly kissing the little pulse beating rapidly on her neck. His fingers ached to ease the narrow silk straps off her shoulders.

'Woman, you are driving me wild!' he breathed into her ear.

Jude was dizzy with desire. Whenever he left her side her mind seemed to hang suspended in paradise, waiting to be claimed by him. Men caught their breath as their eyes lingered on her. Everybody wanted to know her, talk to her, but Jude's eyes were distant, searching the crowd for her man.

The sumptuous supper was served and after eating the guests spilled out into the night where snow was falling in a soft drift on the emerald lawn. Catching at snowflakes and laughing like children, the party followed the music into the marquee where a pop group lit up the sky with their flashing strobe. Jude danced away what was left of the night, in a warm dream of desire. Suddenly there was light on the horizon, stars fading as the sun seeped gold at the edges of morning. Yawning and happy, the guests began to take their leave. Voices floated on the air, calling goodbye, and tired laughter mingled with the last waltz. Couples drifted out of the marquee, treading dew and leaning heavily on each other, arms intertwined as they made their way across the lawn to the car park. The vivid colours of the women's gowns paled as the bright sun came up. Cars started, headlights blazed, and the steady hum of engines filled the air. Jude shivered

'Come with me,' whispered the voice she'd longed for all night. Jude turned and smiled.

'Yes.'

He led her through the empty ballroom littered with plates and glasses and up some side stairs to his bedroom, a beautifully proportioned room drenched in sunlight.

'I've never wanted anybody like I wanted you tonight,' he whispered as he drew her into his arms. Jude couldn't speak. Her throat was tight with longing, her need for him overwhelming.

'Lucius, oh, Lucius,' she murmured as she ran her hands up and down his body. He stooped to kiss her, pushing open her mouth and stroking her even white teeth with the tip of his tongue. Jude moaned and swayed against him as he pushed aside her silken straps. The dress fell in a ripple to her feet and she stood before him, drenched in the dawn light.

'Christ, you're exquisite.'

He threw off his jacket and shirt and laid her on the bed.

'I'll do that,' she said as he reached for the buttons on his trousers.

'Yes, darling . . . do it,' he murmured as he fell back on to the pillows. 'Do it.'

Jude slipped his trousers off and Lucius lifted her on to his supine body.

'Now I can feel every bit of you.'

She smiled down at him.

'You're so beautiful,' she murmured, kissing his smooth, broad chest.

Lucius closed his eyes and ran his hands over her full breasts, caressing her nipples that pricked with desire as his palms rolled over them. His hands flickered down her body then stroked her long, smooth thighs.

'Ahhh . . .' he murmured as he found the warmth inside her. His mouth sank down into the depths of her thighs and Jude gasped softly as a rush of exquisite pleasure coursed through her entire body. There were no thoughts in her

mind, only images and colours . . . sea green oceans and rolling white clouds; dark velvet nights exploding with stars. She held on to him as her mind spun free but her body moved instinctively under him, her hips rising to meet his warm, flicking tongue, her back arching and pushing for more of him. And then a new urgency filled her.

'Lucius, now – please, now!'

As he raised himself Jude saw him, beautiful and erect. She groaned as he rolled over and swiftly lowered her down on to him. When he entered, firm and urgent, everything fell away from her, everything but a dazzling white pulsing that threatened to blow her into a million pieces. She whispered love words she'd never used before then passion stifled speech. Keeping him firmly inside her, Jude raised herself up from his chest and rode each rise and fall of him.

'Oh, I love you,' she whispered. 'I love you, Lucius Carmichael.'

His eyes, dazed with pleasure, smiled back at her as he pulled her down, closer to him, and buried his face in her wonderful flaming hair.

'Fuck me, Jude, fuck me!'

As he moved under her he chanted the words until all she felt was him and all she heard was him. Then he felt her come. A slow ripple of pleasure that spread in wave after wave as she shuddered and cried out in pleasure. He pushed deep into her soft, open body and called out her name, just once, in pure joy then fell exhausted on to her breasts.

Wrapped around with morning light, a tangled heap of tired love, their sleep was deep and instant. Jude woke first and smiled at the wondrous sight of Lucius stretched out beside her. She ran her hands over his chest muscles then reached down and gently caressed the dark hair on his lower belly. He was small now, his beautiful cock a dull pink under her urgent hands. This man was a miracle to her, a delight to have over and over again. Suddenly he stirred and sighed, luxuriously, like a warm tiger.

'Darling . . .' she murmured, gently laying a thigh over his. 'Love me again.'

She stared up into her lover's face and suddenly saw all the tenderness fade.

'SHIT!'

He yelled so loudly Jude jumped and quickly stared over her shoulder to see if somebody had just walked in on them.

'Lucius, what's the matter . . . what's happened?' she cried, suddenly frightened by the change in him.

'It's bloody ten o'clock!'

'So what?' she smiled, wriggling seductively under the cool sheets. 'It is your birthday!'

But he wasn't listening. In a single movement he jumped clear across her and landed on the floor by the open window.

'Lucius!' she cried as he scrabbled into his clothes. 'What are you doing?'

'I've got to meet my godfather,' he mumbled as he pulled on his shoes and socks.

'Don't go,' she pleaded.

'For fuck's sake, Jude! Jacob's one of the richest men in the world.' He ducked into the bathroom and started to throw water on to his face. Still brushing his teeth, he ran out, foaming at the mouth. 'Millionaires hate to be kept waiting. They get impatient and drop zeros off the cheque.' Whizzing the toothbrush on to the bed he wiped his minty mouth on the damask bedspread and headed for the door. 'This could be my lucky day!'

'Lucius,' she cried, scrambling to her knees, 'what's the hurry? Even if he gives you the vineyards, you can't go yet.'

He stared at her, stunned.

'If he gives me the vineyards, I'll go tomorrow.'

'But what about your degree?'

He laughed harshly.

'The degree is shit!' he scoffed. 'I've only been pretending

to do it to keep the old man happy. He'd have stopped my allowance years ago if I'd pulled out.'

Feeling utterly stupid, Jude blushed.

'Oh . . .' she murmured. 'Wouldn't Jacob like you at *least* to finish the year?'

'Jude, the guy's a millionaire with no heir. He likes me, not my fucking education. We both like money, that's what counts.' He opened the door. 'Gotta go, sweetheart.'

She shivered.

'Shall I wait?'

'No, it'll take hours.'

Throwing her a kiss, he slammed the door behind him. Jude listened to the fading sound of his footsteps then slumped back against the bank of soft, white pillows.

'Oh, Lucius, don't go,' she moaned, rolling over into his place, still warm with the smell of their love making. Her eyes prickled with unshed tears. It was an agony to lie there, without him beside her.

'Oh, Lucius . . .' she almost wept as she crept out of his bed and searched the room for her discarded dress.

Anxious to get away before the servants started asking awkward questions, she slipped through the labyrinth of corridors until she came to one of the side doors that led into the tradesmen's car park at the back of the house. It was busy with people clearing away the debris from the night before. Jude managed to cadge a lift back to Leeds in one of the caterers' vans. Squashed in beside the waste bins brimming with chicken suprême, rice salad and chocolate gâteaux Jude began to feel very sick, but behind the sleaziness of her surroundings love blazed golden inside her and she was transformed by it. As she walked up the hill back to her flat, unaware of passers by staring at her elegant but stained ballgown, Jude smiled.

'He'll phone,' she said out loud. 'I know he'll phone.'

Lucius didn't call. Not that day, or the next. Not ever.

Chapter Two

Jude hit the high moors and braced herself as the wind came racing over the tops and hit her, smack between the eyes. This was the stuff that she was used to. With her brother she'd often walked the fells searching out sheep during lambing time. Bad weather never fussed Jude. Hunched up, head bent, she trudged on over the squelching peat bogs. The wind was doing its best to keep the rain back but the heavy sky finally gave way and the heavens opened. Jude battled on, feeling like Lear on the blasted heath.

"'Blow winds and crack your cheeks,'" she yelled, laughing out loud at her own foolish behaviour.

Every ten minutes or so she'd check her bearings against the line of hills to the west where she knew Wuthering Heights was. It was simple enough to find on a clear, bright day but in weather like this it would be easy to lose her way and finish up lost on the flanks of the Pennines. As she began the long uphill climb, she leaned back into the wind and let it carry her body forward. There was nothing here to hurt or shame her.

A gaggle of dirty sheep disturbed her. Led by a grumpy ram they trotted past Jude, bleating and bouncing against her. She ignored them. A lifetime of sheep rearing had left her indifferent to grumpy rams with mean horns but something else troubled her. She'd spotted a man skirting a dry stone wall about two hundred yards away. He went up and down the length of the wall then struck out north across a stretch of boggy ground.

Good, thought Jude.

Today she wanted the Heights to herself. As always when

she arrived on this high ridge, she wondered exactly where the site of the house had been. There was a scatter of black stones that could have been anything really – an old byre, stables, a pig-pen, maybe the Heights itself. Jude sensed that Heathcliff had lived here, and maybe other lovers drawn by the elemental glory of the land. In the summer, with the larks rising and the harebells dappling the heather, it was a perfect place for lovers to lie with the sun on their faces. In the winter they would have needed hearts of fire to withstand the freezing temperatures. Glancing up she saw the rainclouds massing once again and quickly headed for the shelter of an outcrop – perhaps the secret meeting place of those long-dead lovers.

For at least ten days after the ball she'd tried phoning Lucius's flat. All she ever got was his answerphone. Swallowing her pride, she'd eventually phoned Abbey Park, in the hope of finding him there.

'Mr Lucius isn't available,' Sissons told her frostily. Jude began to think she was going mad. In her darkest moments, when she thought she'd imagined everything, she'd take the dress from her wardrobe and sniff it. Faint traces of perfume lingered on the rippling silk and a small stain of spilt champagne. It hadn't been a dream, it had happened, she told herself over and over again. So why didn't he phone her?

Tormented, she haunted the bars she knew he favoured, hoping he'd walk in and put all her fears to rest, but he didn't. None of his friends seemed to know where he was.

'You must have heard something,' Jude insisted when she bumped into his drinking pal, Marcus Carruthers, three parts gone in the wine bar. She stopped short, suddenly aware that she was speaking very loudly. 'Sorry,' she murmured. 'I just need to talk to him.'

It wasn't until she'd bought him his second double whisky that Carruthers loosened up.

'Please, Marcus?' begged Jude, hating herself. 'Don't you remember *anything*?'

'Yah, I remember.'

'What Marcus – *what*?'

'His godfather made him an offer he couldn't refuse.'

Marcus laughed as if he'd said something witty and original. Jude joined in when all she wanted to do was smack his silly, sweating face.

'What was the offer?'

'Vineyards in California.'

Jude nodded. She'd assumed from the last conversation she'd had with Lucius that he'd been expecting at least that. So what was the big deal? she wondered, more confused than ever. Squeezing Marcus's clammy hand she stared at him, the picture of rejected love. With the booze belting through his veins, Marcus turned bold. If Carmichael didn't want this tart, he did. Throwing an arm about Jude and barely missing hitting her across the face, he slurred, 'Fuck Lucius, sweetheart, he's going away.'

'Away?'

'Yah. He's off to his vineyards and he won't be coming back.'

'But what about his finals?'

'Darling girl, he's been offered MILLIONS!'

'When does he go?' she asked weakly.

'Dunno.'

His attention had strayed to a couple of lively-looking girls, laughing shrilly, at the other side of the bar. Jude bristled. By fair means or foul she was going to get what she wanted out of this stupid man. Ordering large whiskies, she cuddled up beside him and gently snaked her arm up his back.

'I say . . .' croaked Marcus as she stroked the top of his greasy head.

'Do I have your complete attention?' Jude asked, kissing his oversized ears.

'Absoluters!'

'So, when does he go?'

'Let's go back to my place,' he murmured into her hair. Jude couldn't think of anything worse but carried on caressing his ghastly ears and spotty neck.

'First things first,' she whispered. 'When?'

Marcus had vowed on his mother's ancestral tiara that he would never speak a word of Lucius's plans to anybody but this woman wasn't just anybody she was driving him wild.

'Friday,' he blurted out. 'Now come on, let's fuck.'

'FRIDAY!'

'Yah. Tonight's the final bash with the sorrowful parents,' he said, his hand groping for her breast.

'And tomorrow? Thursday?' she asked, gently pushing his hands away.

'Drinks in here with the chums,' grunted Marcus, his wet lips sucking at her creamy throat. Jude quickly ordered two deadly cocktails. Pretending to down hers as rapidly as he drank his, she waited till his head sank on to the bar then made her getaway. Out in the street she shuddered with relief and prayed Nell and her feminist sisters would never hear of her totally degrading behaviour.

Jude had gone to the college bar the following night. She'd slipped in under cover of the pervading gloom and hid behind a palm in a gloomy corner. She didn't need to look around for Lucius's crowd. Yelling and hooting, they crowded the bar, applauding him as he knocked back a yard of ale. Bringing up almost as much liquid as he was choking down, wet and flushed, Lucius was not a pretty sight. Oddly enough at that moment he looked exactly what she'd always thought of him – arrogant and stupid. Jude decided it was time to claim her lover's attention before alcohol swamped him. Nobody noticed her step out of the shadows and swiftly cross the room.

'Lucius.'

With beer dribbling down his chin, he glared at her.

'Whatta you doing here?' he snapped.

Out of the corner of her eye Jude saw Marcus bearing down on her.

'Bitch!' he bawled 'You bloody well set me up!' Lucius pushed him away.

'Bugger off!' he snarled, and dragged Jude away from the gaping crowd of Hooray Henries

'cow!' Marcus yelled after her.

Once they were outside, Lucius turned on Jude.

'OK, what do you want?'

She'd thought a thousand times how she would speak to him, piercingly clever opening lines worthy of Henry James, but now, when she most needed clever words, they abandoned her. All she could see was the face of the man she loved and so she spoke the truth.

'Why did you leave me?'

Her simple directness floored him. The usual pack of lies died on his lips and uncharacteristically he told her the truth.

'Look, Jude, it was good – really good.'

'So why did you go away?'

He gulped, instantly regretting the truthful approach.

'Things are tricky at the moment,' he prevaricated. 'I'm off to California –'

'It's important for me to know.'

Lucius stared at her and flushed. It was hard hurting a woman so beautiful.

'What happened?' she insisted.

'Jacob offered me the business.'

'Couldn't he wait till you'd got your degree?' She blushed the minute her disapproving words, worthy of a bossy head girl, were out of her mouth.

'Jude! I don't want a degree I wouldn't EVER have got a degree!' He laughed in her face. 'Fuck Leeds and fuck England – I am out of here!'

'Fuck me?' she added, searching his face, willing him to take away some of her pain. 'Do you even remember making love to me, Lucius?'

Jude's haunted eyes and hollow face touched even him.

'Sure. We had a ball.' Yelling and screaming he was used to, this dignified self-control was excruciating. 'Jude, it was great,' he conceded. 'But that's it.' He swiped the air with his hand as if he were slicing her out of his life. 'Jacob's given me a dream ticket and I'm on it.'

'You *still* haven't answered my question – why didn't you come back?'

How could he tell her the truth? Jacob had been waiting for him in the breakfast room. After a night of revelry the household had quickly returned to its usual routine. The mahogany breakfast table shone richly, reflecting the silver coffee pot and fine china. Eggs, bacon, mushrooms, kidneys and fried tomatoes waited on hot plates, their aroma mingling deliciously with that of hot croissants and fresh fruit conserves.

Suddenly famished, Lucius loaded his plate and sat down, carefully avoiding sitting too near his parents. Smiling, tousle-haired and rather sleepy, he was the centre of everybody's affectionate attention that morning. Conversation lightly dwelt on the delights of the previous night until Lola Utz, Jacob's PA and sometime lover, walked in. Holding a sheaf of papers she sat neatly between Lucius and Jacob, her spiky white hair bristling energy, her green eyes hungry for a fat deal. Lucius had met her briefly the night before but she'd been ill at ease at the ball. Partying wasn't her scene, it didn't pay dividends. Now she was different: hungry and sizzling, the sexiest powerhouse of business sense that had ever left New York city. Even after a night's love-making Lucius felt his cock stir in response to the animal in her; she was like a slim cat set to spring. Smiling her all-American white smile, Susie handed him the sheaf of typed papers.

Coolly disguising his mounting nerves he swiftly read along the lines of heavy legal phraseology. It didn't take long to work out the size of the offer – he was being handed Lorimer Wines USA on a plate! Controlling his euphoria, he smiled at

his godfather and replied in his most disarmingly aristocratic manner.

'This is most generous of you, sir.'

Lorimer nodded. Man to man the message had been communicated. The kid would take over, get the hell out of this damp ancestral dump that was freezing his balls off, and make megabucks. He could take off and do what he liked doing best, travelling and making love to beautiful women. It was a good deal all round. Now all Jacob had to do was square it with the parents, genteely twitching opposite. He'd already talked to Stokes about the offer, and found him concerned that Lucius was wayward enough without having a million in the bank. Lorimer had reasoned that you only kept a million in the bank if you made another million to go with it. Get the kid off his ass and hustling out there in the real world! was his advice. Now it was down to Lucius. He was a big boy, and it was time for him to fight his own corner.

'I've already discussed things with your parents,' said Jacob. Lucius nodded, easily reading between the lines. His parents wouldn't like it but he was sick of living his life for them. It was better to go now, he argued reasonably, rather than wait till June. He hated his course, hadn't done any work, and had been told twice, by two separate tutors, that he would undoubtedly fail his finals. What was the point of staying on? Why not leave before the university kicked him out? Disapproving as his parents were they couldn't argue with the fact that their son and heir had failed miserably in his academic career.

The day was spent in tedious family discussions but Lucius was winning. He escaped briefly to shake his godfather by the hand and arrange his first business meetings in LA. Lola worked with speed and initiative, phoning up directors and shareholders, faxing details and discreetly interrupting family discussions with brief asides to Lucius or Lorimer.

Her long, muscular legs began to dominate Lucius's imagination. As he fell into bed that night, exhausted but triumphant, they were the last thought on his mind, and when he awoke in the middle of the night they were firmly wrapped around his waist. Powerful and totally domineering, Lola Utz entered his bed and his life on a route march of passion. She decided the game and executed it energetically. Lucius had never known screwing like it. Nothing inhibited or embarrassed her. If it was there for the doing, she did it. Lucius, like a man drowning in a sea of pleasure, could only lie back and take it. Just thinking about her, stretched out along his body, pressing her lean thighs into his hips, gave him a hard-on. He smiled with pleasure as he remembered the way her small breasts fitted perfectly into the palms of his hands.

'Did I say something funny?' Jude asked him, dragging him back to reality.

'No, no,' he blustered. How could he tell her the truth? 'I was, er, busy that morning,' he finished lamely.

'The caterers were busy too but they didn't mind bringing me home with the pig-swill.'

A pang of guilt shot through him. She had been so beautiful when he'd left her. Lying on his tumbled bed with her flaming hair dishevelled around her, her warm body open to him like a flower.

'Jude . . .' he murmured just as Lola walked into the bar.

'Nice and cosy, are we?' she snapped.

Lucius quickly backed away from Jude.

'Susie, meet Jude.'

'I'd rather not!' she snarled.

'Darling, Jude's an old friend.' He turned to her, clearly expecting her to back him up. 'She's having problems with her English essay,' he added. '*Twelfth Night*, isn't it, Jude?'

Lola's expression visibly changed. The academic line was novel to her, not business nor money, just hunky, turn-on stuff. She imagined Lucius in a black college gown

delivering a lecture on Shakespeare, and went weak at the knees.

'Hey, lover,' she whispered. 'Are you giving up all this intellectual stuff for me?'

If Lucius hadn't been so relieved by her change of mood he would have laughed out loud. Him – an intellectual! But the lascivious light in her slanting eyes told him there was mileage in her fantasy.

'I will miss those erudite lectures,' he said, and shivered with pleasure as Susie ran a perfectly manicured hand along his thigh.

'You're gonna go down a bundle in California, Prof,' she teased.

Smiling at each other they turned their backs on Jude. As Lucius disappeared into the bar, Lola turned round and hissed, 'Back off, bitch!'

The months that followed were the darkest of Jude's life. Ironically spring came late that year and late in Leeds was nearly April. A sleety, sloppy snow drizzled down for weeks at the start of term, perfectly reflecting Jude's misery.

'Please eat,' Nell begged, sick with worry. Her friend's sad face and gaunt body nearly broke her heart, and when she wasn't feeling sorry for Jude she was planning hideous tortures for Lucius Carmichael. The bastard! But why was she surprised? He had only behaved in the manner natural to him, appallingly. If she'd been asked to bet she would have put a hundred pounds on his hurting Jude, and she would have won. Nevertheless it was hideous to see her dearest friend so cruelly dumped. Even bombproof Nell was shocked by the change in her. Gone was Jude's natural vibrancy. She had no energy, no appetite, had lost her intellectual glow and political zest. She was empty, washed up and deeply damaged. There was nothing to do except stay close and protect her. Nell cooked meals for her, drank with her, talked to her and worked with her, willing Jude not to give

up, not to fade away, not to give in to Carmichael. The only good thing that happened during that long, dark winter was his departure. He disappeared on a sea of champagne parties hopefully, thought Nell, to choke on his own excesses in the New World.

By early-March the snow had given way to rain, then to a low mist that finally lifted to reveal spring sunshine. When it came birds sang their hearts out in municipal parks where daffodils and hyacinths ran riot. Spring evaporated Jude's torpor and forced her out of the flat, down the hill to Leeds bus station where she took a chugging, green bus to the high Haworth Moors.

Jude reached the outcrop just as the rain started. It fell as rain does on the moors: in a heavy, metallic curtain, snatched up and hurled by the wind. Jude shivered under the rock and bent over to lessen the impact but in no time she was drenched. With water trickling down her back and breasts she crouched in her shelter and watched the storm race overhead. The heavy cloud progressed down the valley and a weak sun popped out and steamed briefly on the outcrop. Jude stood up and stretched her cramped limbs. There was a sense of clarity in the storm's aftermath and she suddenly knew she would be all right. It would take time but the worst of the pain was over, rolling away like the storm clouds overhead. She would survive Lucius Carmichael. Life would go on. Suddenly she saw the man again.

'Damn him!'

A sharp stab of fear shot through her as he headed straight towards her. Perhaps he'd been following her around all day? She'd been too lost in memories to notice anything. Slipping back into the shelter of the rock she crouched lower, hoping he'd pass by. No such luck. He perched on the slab directly overhead and pulled out a soggy map.

'Shit!' he muttered as the heavens opened for the second

time in five minutes. Ducking under the rock, he came face to face with Jude.

'*Ahh*!' they yelled together.

Jude jumped up and banged her head on the overhang.

'*Oh*!' she bawled as stars flashed before her. 'What the hell are you playing at?'

'I'm so sorry, you gave me such a fright.'

'I gave you a fright! Why don't you look where you're going?'

'I'm truly sorry,' he repeated.

She glared at him through her wet hair.

'What're you doing up here anyway?' she demanded.

'I'm looking around, do you mind?'

She wanted to shout, 'Yes, I do mind, very much,' but knew she couldn't. Instead she stood up and walked away from him.

'May I follow you down?' he asked politely. 'I'm completely lost.'

'I can see that!' she snapped and struck out across the darkening moor. After a steep descent, half-running, half scrambling, they dropped height and saw lights twinkling out from Haworth. Jude peeked at the man but it was too dark to see his face, though his hair stood out golden against the night. She remembered his voice had been soft and polite.

Maybe I was too sharp, she thought, and quickly tried to make up for her lack of manners.

'You're not local, are you?'

'No, I live in Cambridge. I'm a student there, post grad,' he added, short of breath as he tried to keep up with her. 'I'm up here for a few days, staying with an old friend from Cambridge who's recently moved to Leeds University.'

Jude's heart sank into her muddy wellies. There was only one man at the university who'd recently moved from Cambridge and that was Professor Rawlings, her personal tutor.

'Barry and I are working on a book together,' the man

continued, slipping and sliding in the mud but still managing to hold a conversation. 'A student's guide to Renaissance Literature. I doubt we'll ever finish it, we always get side-tracked by something usually booze.'

Jude nodded. Trust her to be rude to the only guy on Haworth Moor who just happened to be a friend of Professor Rawlings.

'You'll not find much up here on the Renaissance,' she said as he stumbled over a clump of heather.

'That's why I came, I'm on the run from all that.'

She smiled to herself. It was nice to know somebody else was on the run as well.

'If you want to escape, there's no better place.'

'I can see that,' he said, and fell flat on his face in the heather. Jude burst out laughing and hauled him up.

'By the way, I'm David Osborne,' he said, wiping mud off his nose.

'Jude Summers. I'm a student at Leeds.' She suddenly started to giggle. 'Barry Rawlings is my tutor.'

In the billowing darkness they dropped down into Haworth and blinked like tired owls in the yellow glare of street lamps. Jude's legs had turned leaden and she felt ravenously hungry. The smell from a nearby chippy set her taste buds jumping and without consulting her companion she joined the queue outside the shop. It was only then that she saw David Osborne for the first time. He was absorbed in reading the menu so his face was in profile but Jude could have guessed his looks from the tone of his voice. The elegance of his manner matched his sensitive face with pale blue, dreamy eyes, a firm mouth, open smile and a thick boyish mop of hair. He looked about twenty-five, probably coming to the end of his research fellowship, thought Jude.

'Chips and fish twice for me,' he ordered. 'What can I get for my guide?'

'Once is enough.'

But it wasn't. In the draughty bus-stop outside the chippy

Jude finished off her supper then scratched around in David's chip bag for the last of his scrappy bits. The bus for Leeds wheezed up and they clambered on. It was the same driver who'd brought Jude up earlier. He smiled at her as she handed over their bus-fares.

'Lookin' a lot better now, lovie,' he said, nodding at David and winking. Jude winked back.

'Yes, I feel a lot better.'

Squeezed up on the front seat she gave David a guided tour of the countryside in the dark. It was only after they'd passed Abbey Park that she realised she'd forgotten to point it out as one of the main landmarks.

'Have I said something funny?' he asked, puzzled by her suddenly radiant smile.

'No. I've just laid a ghost,' she answered.

David stared at her as she gazed out of the darkened window. Tumbled, damp hair fanned out around her pale face with its perfectly straight, elegant nose, full mouth with beautifully curved lips, small firm chin and high cheekbones. She would have made Michelangelo itch for charcoal and paper. David could only gaze in wonder. Aware of his attention she turned to him, her silver-grey eyes as clear and open as a rain-washed sky. Neither spoke, there was no need to, but both held the moment, aware of something passing between them.

As they pulled into Leeds bus station, Jude's heart sank. She didn't want this journey to end.

'Like a drink?' she asked, surprising herself.

David nodded. 'Love one,' he answered with a warm smile

Dog tired but happy they walked up the hill to the Union Bar where Jude bought drinks. The combination of a day's walking and the heat of the crowded bar suddenly made them both relaxed and drowsy. Over pints of strong Yorkshire bitter they chatted easily and openly. Jude's guess had been right. He was nearly twenty-five and halfway through his English doctorate at King's College.

'And you?' he asked.

She put down her glass. She hadn't given much thought to her work since Lucius had walked out.

'Third year honours, English, and lagging behind.'

'Bored?'

'No,' she answered sharply. 'Distracted.'

He tactfully changed the subject.

'Have you been to Cambridge?'

Jude shook her head. Apart from visits to London, she was very much northern-based.

'It's beautiful,' he said. 'Especially King's – though I would say that. My room has one of the best views of the river.' Jude smiled, imagining him in a medieval courtyard scurrying to lectures in a flowing black gown.

'Sounds a bit too fanciful for me,' she said. 'I like things realistic rather than archaic.'

'You sound like some of my friends,' he answered with a wry smile.

'Wow! Revolutionaries in Cambridge?' she teased.

'No, just pains in the arse.' He took a gulp of beer. 'Anyway what's wrong with beauty?'

'Nothing. I grew up in one of the most beautiful places in England, but it was wild and naturally beautiful, not contrived like Cambridge.'

'C'mon, it's not all ivory towers and huffy-puffy pipes. Give it a whirl?'

Jude shrugged.

'I can't promise you the rugged beauty of Haworth Moor but I can promise to punt you up the Cam on a warm spring day.'

It was ridiculous how the idea beguiled her. The notion of drifting upriver on a balmy day, sweet with birdsong, completely seduced Jude. Rather woozy and happy for the first time in months, she stared into his soft blue eyes.

'Think about it?' he said, lightly dropping his hand on hers. She wondered if he was spinning her a line but his open face

belied deceit. She'd had enough pain and loneliness to last her a lifetime. Maybe she would go? A wave of peace washed over Jude, her eyelids drooped, and her head flopped on to David's shoulder.

'Oops, sorry,' she mumbled.

'Don't be, I'm enjoying it.'

He stroked back the heavy fall of her hair and gently pulled her to her feet.

'Time for bed.'

They walked across the campus then stopped, reluctant to part.

'I'd like to see you again, Jude,' he murmured, smiling at her through the rain that had chased them all day.

'*Why?*'

'Because I like you and you're beautiful. Er . . . is that enough, or would you like me to go on about your charm and intelligence?' Jude smiled but at the same time a voice at the back of her head said, 'No, you'll get hurt, don't do it.' She opened her mouth to refuse but heard herself say yes.

'*Yes*,' she repeated with delight, and walked home through the rain that had suddenly become her friend.

He wrote to her about a week later, on a postcard of King's College Chapel on the back of which he'd copied a poem by Emily Brontë:

Child of delight! with sunbright hair,
and seablue, seadeep eyes.
Spirit of Bliss, what brings thee here,
Beneath these sullen skies?

'Come and see next weekend?' he'd finished. 'Love, David.' Without hesitation Jude accepted. There might be pain, or even worse, humiliating rejection, but she had to risk it if she wanted to live again. It was oddly comforting that David didn't double her heart beat or send her dizzy with desire. That she

would have distrusted. She liked his open smiling face and his honesty. She liked the way he talked about books and people, and she especially liked the idea of getting out of Leeds, even if it was only for a few days. Since her day of reckoning on Haworth Moors she'd returned to her studies with zeal but there was a lot of lost time to make up for.

She made an appointment to see Professor Rawlings who oddly enough didn't reproach her for missing lectures or failing to hand in essays on time. She wondered if he and David had talked about her, but what did David know? She'd told him nothing about her private life. Possibly Rawlings knew more than he let on; after all, gossip travelled fast on a college campus. Jude began to enjoy her work again, regaining some of her old vigour, glad to be occupied and focussed once more. In order to take a weekend off she had to work flat out the week before, finishing a long overdue Dickens essay which she handed in on her way to the railway station. Exhausted, she slept the entire train journey south and when she woke up it was like being in another country.

As the train pulled into Cambridge station David was there waiting for her. She saw him before he saw her, his hair golden in the sunshine as he eagerly peered up the track at the oncoming train. She'd been standing excitedly by the open window but the sight of him suddenly intimidated her. Lucius's face floated before her and panic engulfed her. Maybe she'd been too impetuous, and this visit wasn't such a good idea after all? Suddenly the door flew open and David was standing there.

'Jude!'

She stared up at him and smiled with relief. How could she have forgotten his sweet spontaneity? Hadn't he released her that day on Howarth Moor?

Taking her bag in one hand and holding on to her with the other, David led her down the platform, out into the busy

crush of Station Road. He cut a path between taxis and headed straight for the bicycle racks.

'I've got a surprise for you,' he said, and pointed to a bright yellow tandem. 'Hop on!'

Jude laughed as she cycled, gazing around with unexpected pleasure. The city was beautiful. Sunlit colleges flashed by, cloistered medieval courts brimming with flowers. Bells chimed out the hour in King's Parade where David locked the tandem to a lamp post.

'It is a bit like a film set,' she teased as they entered King's main quad, dominated by the chapel soaring high against a clear blue sky. The centre of the quad was bright with emerald grass which she stepped on to to get a better view of the chapel.

'Watch out! Only college fellows can walk on the grass.' Jude couldn't believe she was hearing him right.

'That's ridiculous.'

'I know.'

'It's elitest too.'

'It's an elitest place.'

A stooped, old man in a flowing black robe tottered across the lawn like a tired starling.

'Who's he?' she asked.

'A college fellow. He's earned the right to walk on the hallowed turf of King's.'

Jude sniffed derisively.

'Come on, I'll show you my totally non-elitest room before you have a brainstorm.'

David led her down to King's bridge beside which was a large Victorian court marked 'PRIVATE'. The post-graduate rooms were at the top of the building. He had a large study and separate bedroom, both with arched, leaded windows overlooking Clare College and the Backs, now awash with cow parsley and long-stemmed buttercups.

'You're lucky,' she sighed, as she gazed out of his window down on to the River Cam.

'I know, I love it,' he admitted with boyish pleasure. 'Enjoy the view. I'll make tea.'

Jude watched students drift by in slender punts. One of them, determined to do better than the others, plunged his pole deep into the river where it got stuck in the mud below. She watched, mesmerised, as the punt moved one way and the boy went the other.

'Let go!' yelled his friends, but the boy held on. For a brief moment he balanced upright on the pole then over he went with a yell and a splash. His friends yanked him out, pole and all.

'Well done!' called Jude from above.

Surprised, the wet boy blew her a kiss then continued on his journey. As their laughter floated away peace returned to the river, broken only by the anxious quacking of a mother duck. Suddenly a beautiful girl walked into the room.

'For fuck's sake, David, where's your *Thesaurus*?'

He calmly set down the tea pot.

'Jude, meet my foul-mouthed neighbour, the Honourable Claudia Langham.'

The Honourable Claudia beamed at Jude.

'Nice to meet you, Jude. Where did you come across this reptile?'

'On a moor.'

'That figures. Is all that for you?' she asked, eyeing the food on the tray.

'It was,' said David.

Claudia sat down.

'Was he wandering "lonely as a cloud"?'

'He was definitely wandering,' smiled Jude.

'And she rescued me,' added David.

'You've needed rescuing since the day you were born,' teased Claudia.

They sat together for an hour, chatting in the high room bathed in green river light. Claudia was an undergrad and lived on the ground floor, in less spacious accommodation.

'A one-room rabbit hutch with a shared kitchen for twenty. I use the post grad facilities, why not?' she shrugged. 'Somebody has to share it around. These fascists won't.'

'That's Claude's way of exonerating herself for taking baths up here, cooking ten course suppers and not inviting us, and wandering in at any time to borrow my books.'

'Especially your *Thesaurus*!' laughed Claude.

Jude smiled. She liked the Hon. Claudia who was tall and willow-slim in black jeans with braces hitched over a skimpy T shirt and heavy black boots that contradicted the glorious femininity of silver-blonde hair falling sleek and silky past her shoulder blades. Claudia constantly looped it behind her ears as she talked, revealing a face vibrant with humour and intelligence. She and Jude got through most of David's fruit cake as they talked and discovered they were the same age, both studying English, and in their final year.

'Leeds sounds better,' Claudia mumbled through a mouthful of crumbs. 'More radical, less traditional – well, it would be, wouldn't it?' She rolled her eyes in mock horror. 'Shit! The old guys here are still freaking out about the college accepting women back in the seventies. Big deal.' Leaning forward she whispered, not too sotto voce, 'You should check out the English faculty. If it's not classical it's never happened.'

Jude burst out laughing at her witty delivery. David grimaced.

'Look at Rawlings. The best! He couldn't get away from here fast enough. These arseholes stifled him with their conservatism.'

'Claude, that's not true. Barry left because he got offered the chair at Leeds.'

'Sure – but he didn't hang about here having agonised second thoughts. No way! He was out in a flash. Your gain, Jude, our loss.'

'Why did you ever agree to come here, Claudia?' Jude asked curiously. 'Surely you must have known it wasn't your kind of place.'

David clapped his hands in rapture. 'Hah! A question that I've asked a hundred times.'

'Piss off,' she sniped, flicking cake at him. 'I came,' she said, addressing herself only to Jude, 'because I got a scholarship and my parents have continued to reward me generously for it.'

'Sold for thirty pieces of silver.'

Claudia stood up and put her boot on David's stomach.

'Rat!'

Picking up the *Thesaurus*, she headed for the door.

'See you later, Jude,' she called from the landing.

'Come on, we need some peace,' said David. 'I'll take you to Evensong.'

The chapel was virtually empty, apart from a few members of the college, spectre-like in flowing robes. After a few coughs and splutters the cool, clear voices of the choristers soared high over the congregation, rippling round the fan vaulting on the ceiling, filling the chapel with the purest sound. Jude listened, awestruck, her senses reeling. When the setting sun fired the west window, setting alight the jewel-bright stained glass, she took hold of David's hand and squeezed it.

'Thank you,' she whispered, her face suffused with peace. 'I'm glad I came.'

There was a party that night at the Footlights Club. In the privacy of the locked bathroom Jude dressed with care, trying on a couple of outfits but finally settling for a short pink swirling skirt and a skimpy cotton top that showed off her elegant neck and shoulders. She left her hair loose, wore minimal make-up, and splashed herself all over with Dioressence. David caught his breath when she walked back into his room.

'Jude! You look wonderful.'

He'd known from their first meeting that if he were to have any success with Jude he would have to take things easy. It

didn't need a first-class degree to guess that the girl had been hurt, it was written all over her beautiful face. Seeing her now he ached to take her into his arms. Instead he took her hand in his and led her out on to King's Parade.

Claudia was sitting on a table in the club wearing sizzling pink lycra shorts and a bandeau of pink elastic around her high, firm breasts. She was drinking claret out of a bottle, arguing about Proust.

'JUDE!' she yelled over the music. 'David, I'm taking her away for ten minutes so that I can introduce her to all the people you don't like.'

Holding her arm, Claudia led Jude into the crowd. When they heard she was from Leeds everybody immediately asked her about Barry Rawlings.

'How is he?'

'Good,' answered Jude. 'We like him.'

'So did we,' answered a deep voice behind her. 'Unfortunately the English faculty didn't.'

Jude turned and saw the face of a striking young man with intense dark eyes and a wide, warm smile.

'Jude, this is Jonathan,' said Claudia. 'He wants to dynamite the Cambridge English faculty.'

'Shhh, here comes David,' whispered Jonathan. 'He wants to canonise the dean!'

It was perfectly clear that Jonathan was all set to wind David up.

'We've just been telling Jude what a shit-hole Cambridge is,' he said.

David smiled wearily, bored with the line he'd heard a thousand times.

'Let's dance,' Jude said, and whisked him away.

'Thanks,' he yelled over the pounding music.

'How long's Jonathan been here?'

'Too long! He's been complaining about the university since he started his post grad work three years ago.'

'So why does he stay? For money, like Claudia?'

'Ambition,' David shouted over the steady thud of a base guitar. 'He wants everything he can get from this place but despises himself for taking it. That's my theory anyway,' he finished with a self-conscious laugh.

Jude nodded, choosing to dance rather than talk. What a weird place, she thought. So far every other person she'd met had a love-hate relationship with the university but somehow couldn't bear to leave it. Could David be the only one who openly adored it?

As the night wore on the atmosphere became drunkenly intense, heavy with intellectual and sexual competition that was both intriguing and disturbing to an outsider like Jude. Suddenly she saw Claudia leaning against David, running her fingers through his thick hair, her face inches from his. Jude's blood ran cold. The intimacy of the moment reminded her explosively of Lucius . . . running her hands through *his* hair as he bent over her on the bed . . . the perfect weight of him between her spread legs. Blind panic gripped her. She quickly set down her glass and made for the door, pushing against a wall of people in her way. Somebody gripped her shoulder as she passed by. It was Jonathan.

'Jude, are you all right?'

'I, er . . . I want some fresh air,' she muttered.

He led her out into the cool of the night then quickly went back into the club and found David. Claudia was still hanging around his neck.

'Piss off, Claude,' he snapped, disengaging her arm. 'Better go outside and see Jude,' he told David.

She was sitting staring up at the bright, starry sky.

'Are you all right?' David asked.

'Fine,' she lied. 'Just hot.'

He sat down beside her and took her hand, gently playing with each of her fingers.

'I know you've been hurt, Jude,' he began awkwardly. 'I've been waiting for the right moment – '

She looked at him, that straight honest look that he would come to know and love.

'Not now,' she answered firmly.

He nodded.

'OK. Then I'll tell you about me and Claude.'

'Not that either.'

'It's important – '

He got no further. Claudia came stumbling down the dark passage.

'Jude!'

'Shit!' muttered David.

'I must talk to you,' said Claudia.

'I wish you'd all stop making confessions,' laughed Jude.

'When I'm pissed,' mumbled Claudia crashing down beside Jude and laying her head on her shoulder, 'I want everybody, especially David. Shall I tell you why?'

Jude shook her head.

'No, but you're going to.'

She was right. Claudia rolled on.

'Because he doesn't fucking well want *me*!' she wailed. 'He's afraid of me!'

'Come on, Claude,' said David, gently taking hold of her. 'Here's Johnny.'

Jonathan took Claudia into his arms and kissed her crumpled face. Jude stared at him in the starlight, tender and loving his mouth pushing open Claudia's lips Moaning, she twined her legs about his thighs.

'Let's fuck . . .'

'See you tomorrow,' said Jonathan as he steered her away.

David sighed with relief.

'Thank God somebody can keep her quiet.'

Back in his room David lit the gas fire and sat next to Jude on the sofa. Dreamily he lifted the weight of her hair, burying his face in its fragrant abundance. Jude stiffened as panic stormed

her senses. She remembered other lips kissing her neck and moving down to her breasts. Lucius whispering her name as he teased her nipples into sharp pink mounds. A suffocating fear drained the blood from her face and she gripped David's hands so tight her knuckles turned white.

'Jude?' he murmured, shocked by the terror in her silver-grey eyes. 'I'm sorry. It's just, you're so beautiful . . .' Words failed him as he stared into her face, stiff with fear.

'I can't make love to you,' she gasped. 'Not yet.'

There, she'd said it. David smiled and stroked her hand, curled into a fist.

'That's OK,' he said, raising it to his lips and slowly unfolding her fingers to kiss each of her fingernails. 'I can wait.' The wound ran deeper than he'd thought. 'I'll make some tea then we'll go to our separate beds, like fairytale lovers!'

Jude sighed with relief, grateful to him for making it easy for her. Picking up on his attempt at light-heartedness, she glanced around the room.

'I don't see two fairytale beds.'

'I'll sleep in Jonathan's bed, he lives across the landing. He'll be staying with Claude tonight.'

She nodded, relief combining with envy as she thought of Claudia's sexual ease. Sensing her embarrassment, David drew her into his arms and hugged her.

'Hey, it's okay.'

Burying her head against the prickly wool of his jumper, Jude muttered, 'Is it?'

He didn't answer but kissed the top of her head.

'How long have you known Claudia?' she asked.

'We were at Winchester together. She looked me up when she came to King's three years ago and has badgered me to death ever since.'

'And Jonathan?'

'We go back a long way. We used to be great friends but now we just piss each other off all the time.'

'That's obvious.'

'We used to try and outdo each other as undergrads. You know, kid's stuff like who'd got the best mark in an English essay. Then in our final year it all went badly wrong. We started to argue about fundamental issues. He rejected the traditional syllabus of English Literature, and went with the Structural Revolution. I was left defending the despised conventional corner which he loathes. Believe me, our friendship has never been the same since and Claudia, being the regular little shit-stirrer she is, makes things a thousand times worse.' He paused, lost in thought. 'Still, he should be leaving soon.'

'Why?'

'He's got a place at UCLA Film School. He wants to be a director, you know.'

'Why do you envy him so much?'

'He just always seems to get what he wants.'

Jude laughed at his tragic expression.

'Cheer up. Your turn will come.'

'It already has,' he said, kissing open her mouth.

The next morning Jude woke to the soft splashing of the river. Sunlight dappled the ceiling of the room and everything was perfectly still. Naked, she slipped from her bed and peeped out of the window. Church bells rang out across the city but within the college walls all was silence. The only sign of life was a punt drifting downriver, skilfully steered by a punk in leathers. Suddenly the spell was broken by a troop of chattering choristers walking over King's bridge on their way to morning service. Skinny, chubby, short and tall, they were all dressed alike in black Victorian suits, their bright faces obscured by huge top hats that made them look like Dickensian mourners.

Jude smiled as they clattered under the window and was struck afresh by the startling eccentricity of the place. The university seemed to be locked in a time-warp. As if to

prove her point, Claudia burst in wearing a flowing, chiffon tea dress.

'Jude, we're going period piece.' She threw a dress on Jude's bed. 'With a hat you'll look the part.'

'What hat?'

'The one I'm off to nick from the props room,' answered Claudia, and whisked out with a mischievous giggle. Jude slipped into the long dress, patterned with red poppies and fastened with tiny jet buttons. When David walked in, wearing Oxford bags and a striped blazer, she burst out laughing.

'Is this a Noël Coward play?'

'No. Claude's dressing us up. Well, I did promise you a punt ride. Now you've got it in style.'

Ten minutes later Claudia swanned back in wearing white organza and a twenties cloche hat speckled with feathers.

'This'll look ravishing on you, Jude.'

She held up a straw hat, draped in cream net and decked with wax fruit and faded ribbons.

'Perfect!' said Jude. 'Where are you taking me?'

'To Grantchester. Come on, guys, Johnny's waiting in the punt.'

Jonathan was ready, dressed in cream bags and a white linen shirt.

'All aboard!' he called.

Balanced on the small, raised platform at the end of the punt, he looked wonderful. The river light intensified his dark eyes and gilded his curls, making him look like a Botticelli angel. They shot down river with the sun streaming gold around them and swallows swooping overhead. Drifting slowly through the flat green meadows, dipping under gnarled willows, curling up river with the heat soaking into them, they lay spellbound by the magic of the day. Suddenly Jonathan stopped punting and started to strip off his clothes.

'Time for a swim!' he said, and dived into the green river water.

'Wait for me!' called Claudia, stripping down to her panties.

Jude followed suit and dived in ahead of her. Used to icy tarns and lakeland streams, the gentle Cam felt like warm bathwater. She swam underwater, flicking through the reeds like a mermaid. When she came bubbling up, wrapped about by her tangled hair David was anxiously scanning the river.

'Jesus, Jude, we thought you were dead!' he gasped.

'Dead! Nobody could die on a day like this.'

To prove it she kicked water into his face then slipped gracefully back under the surface, swimming in and out of Jonathan's legs like a slender fish. When they all finally clambered back into the punt Claudia was waiting, with lunch.

'Curried chicken, smoked salmon, salade Niçoise, Stilton, granary bread and freshly picked strawberries – help yourselves!'

'Where did it all come from?' asked David. 'You were in bed till ten.'

'Ah, but I 'ave zee little French cook, 'ow you say? Er . . . eating out of my 'and!' giggled Claudia. 'Anyway I wanted something special to celebrate meeting Jude.'

With their golden and silver heads drying in the sunshine the two women smiled at each other.

'Thanks, Claude,' said Jude. 'This is very special.'

After a long lunch, soporific with champagne, they lay in the boat and watched the swallows skim over the water's edge.

'When we're rich and famous,' said Claudia, wrapped around Jonathan like a long legged Siamese cat, 'we'll meet up every summer and do this.'

'What, get pissed?' teased Jonathan, holding swathes of her hair up to the sun and watching the light fire it white.

'That too,' laughed Claudia.

'I'll fly in from LA with rave reviews of my latest production,' he said.

'And I'll swan up from London,' said Claudia, 'and interview you before I seduce you.'

'Producers must screw their guests,' Jonathan reminded her. 'It makes for a cosier atmosphere.'

David remained silent. Even on a day like this he was loath to bare his soul to Jonathan's scrutiny.

'David, speak up!' demanded Claudia, tickling his face with her toes. 'Your wish is my command,' she said, waving the wine bottle like a wand.

'Oh, I'll have to be dragged screaming from my ivory tower,' he said, pre-empting her wrath.

Fortunately both Claudia and Jonathan were too content to argue about anything.

'And Jude?' Jonathan asked. 'Where will you be?'

'She'll be right here with me,' answered David.

His voice, suddenly loud with conviction, surprised them out of their drowsiness. Jude didn't argue. Right now she was happy to lie with her head in his lap, feeling the warmth of his thighs against her cheek and the soft caress of his hand on her damp hair.

Feeling giddy and ridiculously happy, they cast off and drifted idly on, singing at the top of their voices. Sweet-faced cows ambled curiously to the water's edge and stared down at the noisy revellers.

'MOOOO-OOH!' went Jonathan.

They rounded a curve in the river and Grantchester church with its sturdy little tower floated into view.

'A vast behind!' called Jonathan.

Whacking Claudia's bottom he leapt on to the bank and tied up the punt.

'Who's for a game of jolly old rounders?'

Waving a bat and ball he ran through the buttercups like a three year old. It was the wildest game of rounders Jude had ever played. In between dodging the cow-pats and half-blinding passing tourists they hardly scored a rounder between them. Laughing themselves silly, they wandered through Grantchester to the Orchard Tea Room where they ordered cream teas. In the apple orchard, adrift with

blossom, they set down their scones and China tea and tucked in.

'I can't remember when I last ate so much,' groaned Jonathan, rolling off his chair and lying full-length in the deep grass under the apple trees.

'It's sex!' said Claudia, licking the cream off her lips.

'But that was last night,' he teased. 'Today's been totally sex-free.'

'We can change that,' said Claudia, smothering his sun-tanned face with kisses. They tumbled in the grass, laughing and kissing, oblivious of the disapproving families around them. Jude pretended to smile at their antics but she was uncomfortable.

'Penny for your thoughts,' said David, reaching out and taking her hand.

'I was thinking of you.'

'Good thoughts?'

'Yes,' she lied, and covered her guilt with a kiss.

They got back to King's in the dark.

'Time for bed,' said Jonathan, hardly able to keep his hands off Claudia.

'Thanks for a wonderful day,' said Jude.

'See you soon,' said Claudia, pulling Jonathan into her room on the ground floor. 'Good night.'

In silence Jude followed David up the stairs to his landing.

'Come here, beautiful,' he murmured, pulling her into his arms.

Jude returned his kisses with a passion that surprised her. Excited and delighted, he kissed her harder, opening her mouth and drinking in the taste of her. Just as his hand was tracing the line of her hips and opening up the warmth of her thighs a distant moaning came drifting in through the wide open windows. In the still of the night they could hear Claudia calling out Jonathan's name, a liturgy of love words that made Jude stop, embarrassed.

'Fuck that woman!' snapped David.

'He is.'

She wriggled free and crossed the room to slam the window shut.

'C'mon, Jude. They're only having fun.'

'And we're not.'

'Not yet,' he answered, pulling her close.

'No,' she said firmly, drawing away from him. 'I can't be like that.' She nodded towards the closed window. 'Like you and Claudia.'

He stared at her and suddenly burst out laughing.

'Sweetheart, it was never like that with me and Claude.' He paused uncertainly then continued, 'It was a disaster.'

'I don't believe you.'

He shrugged.

'You'd better.'

'Sex was no good – with Claude? You're joking.'

'We were always good at talking about screwing – but when it came to doing it, she'd get irritable, I'd get nervous and whoosh! I'd come, she'd yell – it was a nightmare.'

He looked at her, overcome with embarrassment.

'Jude! Why're you laughing? This is excruciating.'

'Oh, David, I'm so relieved!' she cried, flinging her arms around his neck. 'I can't imagine a man not being mad about Claudia.'

'I'm mad about *you*,' he answered, pressing her hard against his chest. Smiling peacefully, she sighed.

'I'm glad.'

The long day finally caught up with them and they fell on the sofa, wrapped in each other's arms. The gentle lapping of river water which had woken her that morning now rounded off Jude's night.

* * *

Leeds was dead when she got back, dead and cold. David sent postcards from Venice where he'd gone to research a vital document on Lord Byron. In contrast to the glories of

the Rialto, the Friari and San Giorgio, rain poured on to Leeds where every day was the same for Jude. Up early, jog round the park, revise. Lunch. More revision. At five she and Nell went for a swim in the local pool, a noisy, municipal building that anaesthetised Jude's brain with its bright white tiles and freezing cold water. Supper followed, a meal they made and ate together, then back to the grindstone. Reading took up most of her evenings and she usually fell asleep, fully dressed, about two or three in the morning. She woke with the dawn, just as the milkman was doing his rounds. It seemed endless, especially when Jude was frantically making up for all the time she'd wasted at the beginning of the Easter term.

'It's like living in a time warp,' she complained as each day seeped into the next.

May turned into June and the first exam loomed. David's phonecall the evening before was like a bolt out of the blue.

'*Pronto*!' crackled a voice down the telephone.

'Yes, yes, *ici*!' yelled Jude, in the wrong language.

'*Va bene . . . va bene*,' came back the operator. 'You wait . . . OK?'

Jude waited, hardly daring to breathe, and then she heard David's voice.

'Jude! Jude!' he shouted down the line.

'David! How are you?'

'Missing you.'

'Tell me what you're doing?'

'Right now? Well, I'm standing next to the fishmarket. Here, listen . . .'

Down the line came the cries of the vendors and the babble of shoppers.

'Shit!' bawled David. 'Money's run out - gotta go!'

Jude felt a ridiculous rush of tears.

'David, I miss you!'

'What? I can't hear you.'

'I miss you!' she yelled.

PIP PIP PIP went the phone.

'Good luck tomorrow,' he cried. 'I'll be thinking of you.' The line went dead.

The next day Jude sat her first exam, the practical criticism paper she'd been dreading. But luck was with her. The examiners had set a poem by Emily Brontë that she knew backwards:

The soft unclouded blue of air,
The earth as golden-green and fair
And bright as Eden used to be:
That air and earth have rested me.
Laid on the grass I lapsed away,
Sank back again to childhood's day;
All harsh thoughts perished, memory mild
Subdued both peace and passion wild.

It was a poem that always reminded her of meeting David on Haworth Moor. It seemed to have been written for their encounter, when mildness, gentleness and intellect drove the wild devil from her soul and peace came back to her. With a singing heart she tackled the question and was almost disappointed when she heard the invigilator say there were only five minutes left. She was so geared up she could have written all night, and that was how she was all week, on an automatic high that kept her buzzing twenty-four hours a day – then suddenly it all stopped. Her finals were finished. Feeling tired and empty, she left the exam room and wandered home. She couldn't bear the sight of her own room, the desk littered with revision notes, the bed unmade, books everywhere. She went into the bathroom and ran a hot bath which she soaked in until it turned cold. As she towelled herself dry she realised with a shock how thin she'd become.

Better put a bit of weight on before David gets back, she thought, but there was loads of time for fattening herself up. He wasn't due back for a fortnight. The days following the exams were the oddest of Jude's life. Most of her friends were

still working flat out; Nell's Sociology exams seemed to go on forever. There was no grand celebration, no sense of relief – nothing. After three years of scaling the mountain, Jude had reached the summit but there wasn't a view in sight.

She'd always put off making decisions about her future until the exams were over. At the back of her mind she'd thought of doing a post graduate degree, if her final results were good enough, or a BEd at the Institute of Education if she got anything less than a 2:1. As the long wait to the final result set in she grew lethargic and depressed. Finally exhaustion claimed her and she slept and slept When she woke the world had suddenly turned warm again. Leeds steamed in a heatwave and though Jude was grateful for the rise in temperature, she nevertheless felt stifled by it. She couldn't settle to anything, couldn't even write to David who had left Venice and moved on to Padua. When Nell's exams finished they had a riotous evening then staggered home and partied till dawn. As the last person left, about seven, Jude and Nell fell into bed and Jude thought she'd sleep for a lifetime. The telephone ringing at nine was not unlike a chainsaw going off in her head.

'Oh, God!'

She staggered down the hall and, pressing a clammy hand to her throbbing temple, picked up the phone.

'Jude!' yelled a ridiculously cheerful voice down the phone. 'Fancy a drink?'

The word 'drink' sent her reeling.

'What?' she croaked.

'Jude, are you all right?'

Through the blinding headache and the rising nausea she recognised the voice.

'Professor Rawlings?'

'Yes, how are you?'

'I'm fine,' she lied.

'Good. Can you make twelve?'

Desperate to put the phone down, she said yes and dived

into the bathroom. Black coffee and a cold shower helped her remember where her arms and legs were but nothing could take away the sickly dizziness. She tried to make up her face but couldn't see straight and the only clothes she could find were a cotton sweatshirt and a pair of ripped cycling shorts.

I look a wreck, she thought. Who cares?

'Jude, how nice to see you,' beamed Professor Rawlings. Jude smiled feebly and fell into the corner of his sofa.

'You must be wondering what this is all about?' Too tired to speak she nodded. 'Want a drink?' he said, reaching for the decanter of sherry. She shook her head.

'We've got something to celebrate,' he said. Raising his glass, he toasted her. 'To you, Jude.'

'Why *me*?'

Rawlings smiled. 'My dear girl, you've got a first.'

Jude felt herself slip as the room spun round and round.

'I think I will have that sherry after all.' Grabbing the brimming glass she emptied it in a gulp. 'Did you say a *first*?'

'A brilliant first, Jude. One of the best papers I've ever marked.'

'Oh, you're wonderful!' She lurched across the room to hug him.

'You did it, though I must say you had me worried in the New Year.' He peered at her over his half-moon glasses. 'Thought you had a broken heart.'

'I had.'

'David Osborne's mended it nicely,' he beamed. 'You'll do well together. Shall we have lunch? They do an excellent roast lamb in the Senior Common Room on Wednesdays.'

'But I'm not dressed for it.'

'Nonsense, you always look beautiful,' he answered. 'Anyway there's somebody I'd like you to meet.'

Jude dashed into the ladies' to check her face was clean. She was as white as a sheet but her eyes were dancing with

happiness. Her hair seemed to reflect her joy, fanned out around her face, framing it like a gilded halo.

'A first!' she said to herself in the mirror. 'I've got a *first*!' Since the first year she'd dreamt of getting a first but after Lucius had doubted her own abilities. Now she'd proved herself. If only she could share it with David, right now, and not have to wait till this time next week.

As she hurried across the oak-panelled dining room she saw that Professor Rawlings was already seated and deep in conversation with a young man. It wasn't until she was almost next to them that Jude realised who the young man actually was.

'David!'

The room went deadly quiet as she rushed towards him and threw herself into his arms.

'Jude,' he murmured, and kissed her long and hard.

'Er, shall we order before you give the entire Senior Common Room indigestion?' laughed Professor Rawlings.

They disentangled their arms from around each other's necks and sat as close as possible without sitting on each other's lap. Jude was astonished at how hungry she was.

'I can't believe any of this is real,' she said, digging into her second plateful of Bakewell tart.

'It's *all* real,' laughed Rawlings. 'Now come on, Jude, tell us what you plan to do with your new found success.'

'I haven't a clue,' she answered truthfully.

'Research?' he suggested.

'No, David's put me right off that!'

After a long lunch they drove up to the moors in the battered old 2CV that David had bought from Jonathan before he left for LA. It bounced over the hills as they sang at the top of their voices, the rooftop rolled back to a sky as blue as harebells. They stopped just past Haworth and struck out across the open moor for the Heights.

'"What a difference a day makes,"' sang Jude as her eyes

swept the sun-bleached landscape. The peat bogs had dried up on the lowlands and the going was hot over the hard ground. Even the larks had lost their zing but the swallows, well used to the heat of the Mediterranean, dipped and wheeled above the heather. Holding hands they trudged on, talking and laughing, hardly able to take their eyes off each other. As they rounded a sharp curve in the hills a waterfall splashed and sparkled above them.

'Come on,' said Jude, and running ahead of him she scrambled over the rocks like a mountain goat.

'Wait!' gasped David, trying to keep up. 'I wasn't brought up on a sheep farm.'

'Tough!' she yelled and disappeared from view behind a sheer rock face. Here the waterfall broke into a naturally hewn basin of dark Pennine rock. Wide and deep it swirled under the torrents of water thundering down, sending up a spray of tiny drops that shimmered like a myriad diamonds before they evaporated on the hot air. Jude whipped off her clothes and found a slab perfect for diving off. As David rounded the corner, hot and sweaty, she stood poised like Venus.

'What is it about you and water?' he shouted over the roar of the fall.

'I love it!' she cried as she dived through the air, her body perfectly still before it broke the glittering-bright surface and she disappeared into the clear depths below. Throwing off his clothes, David followed with less grace but more gusto.

'Geronimo!' he shouted as he bombed the icy-cold surface. They both came up gasping for breath and giggling.

'I think I lost something fairly vital down there,' he spluttered.

Shivering they scrambled out and lay breathless on a bank of heather fringed with curling bracken fronds. The sun played the heat back into their bodies as they reached out for each other. Their first kiss was like an electrical current firing them. This time they both knew the same urgent need for each other. Jude tasted his mouth and ran her hands over

his long, slender body, so different from Lucius's it actually made her stop.

'I'm frightened.'

'Don't be,' he whispered, holding her tight.

She could feel the love in him as he kissed her. With exquisite tenderness he entered her and cried out almost instantly. He lay shuddering on top of her, cursing himself.

'Dammit, dammit! Jude, I'm sorry.'

She kissed his head and smiled up into the big, arching blue sky. She wanted to sing out, 'I'm free — at last I'm free!'

'I came too quickly,' he groaned.

'You certainly did!'

'I'll get better,' he said, pulling her down and kissing her beautiful breasts.

'I know.' Sitting astride him she stroked him with a new passion that set his pulse racing. 'Why worry? We've got all summer long to practise!'

Chapter Three

Cambridge that summer was made for love but things didn't quite work out the way Jude had hoped.

She left the North, a drizzle of terraced houses and municipal parks, only the edges of the Pennines breaking through the storm clouds, with a mixture of elation and regret. Leeds held no more secrets for Jude, only memories, and Cambridge beckoned, opulent and seductive, glittering bright in the sunshine.

'What a difference a hundred miles makes,' she said as she scrambled out of the battered 2CV. 'Raining there and boiling here.'

'North and South,' remarked David as he untied the ropes on the roof-rack.

'North and South,' she murmured, gazing up at King's, dreaming in the sunshine.

David caught her expression and smiled.

'Happy?' he whispered.

'Oh, yes!' she answered, throwing her arms around his neck. 'Very, very happy.'

Her move to Cambridge had been a big decision. After David's return from Venice they spent the week together in Leeds, mostly in bed, making love. As her belief in him grew she began to trust his love-making. When she touched his skin it was David she felt, not Lucius. When she ran her hands along the line of his hips and caressed his thighs, it was *his* bone and muscle she felt, not Lucius Carmichael's. She had never reached with him the same frenzied ecstasy she'd achieved with Lucius but never wanted that experience again. It had brought only pain and rejection. After David's

love-making she felt like a goddess. He gave her back everything that Lucius had snatched away. He was there when she closed her eyes and slept beside him, he was there when she woke up in the night, and best of all he hadn't disappeared by morning. He was not a phantom but a man who simply loved her and at every opportunity made his happiness clear.

After a week David left Leeds for Cambridge but came back almost immediately, unable to be apart from her.

'Jude, can't you come and stay with me?' he asked as they lay in bed exhausted, after rapturously making love.

'Stay in Cambridge?'

'It's not the moon,' he said, kissing her startled face. 'Anyway haven't we already had this conversation on the pros and cons of Cambridge?' he reminded her.

'No, I'm not thinking of that.' She paused. 'It's just I'm not clear what you're asking me to do.'

'Live with me!'

She thought he was teasing until she saw the serious but shy look in his eyes.

'Live with you?' Did she want this so quickly?

'For a month, in King's, then we'll go to Venice together.' As ever he'd pre-empted her fear, striking a delicate balance between her independence and his growing need for her.

'King's and Venice? Now that's something.'

'Good, so it's settled?'

She nodded in agreement. 'For a month and then Venice.'

'Hmmmm . . .' he murmured, running his hands slowly up her legs. 'Then we'll talk again.'

Jude firmly grasped his wrist. 'Maybe we'll get on so badly there won't be anything left to talk about?'

'Oh, I doubt it,' he said, opening her legs and kissing the silky softness of her inner thighs. 'You and I, Jude Summers, were made for each other. Believe me.'

* * *

The porters were stunned when David parked outside King's

in his overflowing 2CV. Their eyebrows flickered and their mouths twitched in disapproval as he and Jude hauled out her heavy suitcases.

'I wish I'd left more of my things with my parents,' she hissed at David as they passed the granite faced porters.

'Jude, stop worrying,' he laughed. 'People visit all the time.'

'Visit! This is more like a military take-over.' He ignored her panic and calmly carried on.

'Lovely day,' he said as he passed the Head Porter, Mr Greenhalgh. Jude grinned sheepishly then hurried along in David's confident wake.

'Oh God, I can't hack this!' she groaned.

'They'll have forgotten you in a few hours,' he assured her. She glanced nervously over her shoulder. 'Somehow, I don't think so.'

'Only a month,' he reminded her. 'Then we'll fly away to Venice.'

'It can't come quick enough,' Jude said, as they staggered up and down the stairs with all her possessions.

'Phew . . . I'm knackered!' David gasped and fell flat on the sofa. Jude walked over to the open window and leaned out.

Mmm, that's nice,' she murmured, breathing in the soft river air.

'So's this,' said David, creeping up behind her and pressing himself into the curve of her body as she leaned across the sill. Jude arched her back and gently pushed against him.

'Jude,' he whispered as he cupped her warm breasts in his hands and fondled the nipples. 'Stay right where you are . . . don't move an inch!'

She burst out laughing.

'I can't stay here, you idiot! My head's out of the window! She tried to turn around so that she could kiss him but he held her firmly around the waist.

'David . . .' she gasped as his hands slid up her short summer skirt and tugged at the silk pants around her hips

He pushed open her smooth thighs and she forgot about the world outside his window. Moaning softly as he stroked her, she pushed her buttocks hard into his pelvis, shuddering with pleasure as his hands roamed up and down her body.

'You're so beautiful,' he whispered into her hair then entered her, swift and smooth. Jude pushed harder against him, moving against the insistent surge of his body, pressing then pulling away, pressing deeper and deeper until they were locked together in a great, swaying wave of ecstasy. David came with a cry of joy and Jude turned to him, hungry for his lips and fingers. They spent the rest of the afternoon making love on the floor, then tangled in each other's arms they talked and watched the sky turn from pale blue to dark navy.

'Apart from the grumpy porters,' he murmured, 'have you any regrets?'

Jude laughed softly and pointed at the new moon outside his window. 'How could I regret anything?'

But as the days passed by Jude did have some regrets. With David locked away in the university library she began to feel lonely. He was always kind and considerate but his thoughts were clearly elsewhere. To begin with she sat and chatted, happy just to be with him. She made tea and baked scones in the tiny kitchen on the third-floor landing, bought Italian wine and experimented with new recipes, but his preoccupied expression soon put paid to her romantic intentions. David had work on his mind and she began to realise that the best thing she could do was leave him to get on with it. He was up at six every morning and hard at work by eight, usually working till seven most nights and then reading till after midnight. Jude stayed out of his way till late in the afternoon, but the days were long and hot and after two weeks of wandering the city she began to feel bored and rather homesick.

Cambridge was indeed a beautiful place. She got to know its commons and colleges and the other side of it too, the town that wasn't part of the university. She borrowed a bike

and cycled out of the city limits, exploring the surrounding fen and some of the nearer villages. But its strange, inaccessible beauty made her feel even more isolated; she longed for the cool Northern fells and the secret tarns around Watendlath. The great open skies with their uninterrupted horizons oppressed her and she began to regret her decision to spend a month there.

The nights were better than the days. They had supper together, sometimes in Hall when it was open during the long vac. then coffee and a chat before David resumed his work For Jude the long hours up to midnight were interminable and though her body was tired after a day's walking or cycling her mind was still buzzing. She couldn't settle to anything and the silence of the room stifled her almost to screaming point. She took to walking in the evenings as well as the day, mostly along the Backs, following the course of the river. Nightly she wandered up to Jesus Green lock then across to Midsummer Common, walking full circle back to King's. Tall spires peeped over the tree tops and oriel windows, shone jewel-like across the river. It was in these moments she allowed herself to be briefly seduced by the beauty of the city; the still of the night restoring a balance in her, wiping out the frustrations of the day.

Every night she stopped on King's path and looked up to David's room on the top floor of the Old Court building. Framed in the window she could see his golden head bowed over his books and her heart would contract with love for him. It seemed wrong that she had the time to wander in the moonlight while he worked himself to the bone. The sight of him, tired but diligent, made her determined to give him all the support and encouragement he needed. After all, it was only a month then they would fly away like birds, freed from a cage that had held them all summer long.

Jude always returned feeling better for her walk and made a pot of tea which they'd share before she went to bed Every night she fell asleep to the now familiar lullaby of lapping water

and the steady tip-tap of David's typewriter. Often when she awoke in the early hours she would find him slumped over his books, senseless with exhaustion. Gently she would take him to bed and lie down beside him, soothing his restless murmurings until he fell into a deep, peaceful sleep. One night he woke with a cry, and shivered in her arms like a frightened child.

'Christ, Jude, I don't think I'll ever finish this bloody thesis.' She soothed him, reassuring him it would soon be over, but after it happened for the third time she began to understand there was more to his fear than not finishing his doctorate.

'What worries you most?' she asked one night as he tossed and turned beside her.

'Failing,' he answered, staring up at the ceiling. 'Failing to get a doctorate, failing to get a junior fellowship, failing to stay on here and teach.' He turned on the pillow, his tense face close to hers. 'That just about covers my neuroses, now tell me yours,' he said, trying hard to sound playful.

'No, we're talking about you,' she answered, glad to avoid pinpointing her own fears. 'Go on,' she urged, nudging him in the ribs. 'I'm fascinated.'

'I've said it all. I just want to stay here and be part of this university - forever!' He leaned on his elbow and stared down into her face. 'Now can you understand why Jonathan, the revolutionary in the Eng Lit department, despises me?'

'Who cares about Jonathan Raphael?' she said, gently pushing a lock of hair from David's troubled eyes. He smiled, reassured that she loved him, warts and all.

'Loving you makes me feel so happy.'

'Good,' she whispered, stroking his hair until his breathing was soft and easy. 'Go to sleep.'

Jude too had her fears. She still hadn't come to a decision about a career. Theoretically she had the right kind of degree for a lot of good job prospects but nothing appealed. Publishing, advertising, teaching, researching, the law. She

went through every possible Career Guide and gave up, bored and irritated.

'Something will suddenly turn up,' David assured her. Jude grunted, unconvinced. 'You're still tired after your finals '

'They finished nearly two months ago!'

'So? What's the hurry? You'll be working for the rest of your life.'

'I should be so lucky!'

It was without doubt a difficult time when even their love-making, briefly sweet, was edged with tension, but that month in Cambridge forged their young love into something strong and adult. In their isolation they grew to depend on each other's sympathy and understanding, and surprisingly early reached that mature stage of loving where words aren't always necessary. Neither of them could have known how vital that time in Cambridge would be to them, how it would shape their lives and their dependence on each other, and how it would eventually form the foundation of their marriage.

So the days passed, slow and ordered – then, like a thunderbolt, Claudia turned up. As usual Jude had been out all day. She'd walked to Grantchester Meadows and returned, hot and sweaty, to King's. She could hear voices as she walked up the stairs but nothing prepared her for the shock of seeing Claudia sprawled across David's sofa, eating rock buns and drinking tea.

'You!' cried Jude.

'Me!' answered Claudia, and with a graceful movement she was off the sofa. 'Jude, you look . . .' She stopped and stared at her. '. . . Like shit! What've you been doing to yourself?'

'Only walking – and I'm knackered.'

'Sit down. Eat, drink speak to me!'

Claudia shoved her on to the sofa and handed her tea and cakes.

'I warned you about this city, Jude, it'll suck you dry. It's all your fault, David, you should never have brought her here. Just look at the state of her.'

Jude jumped up and checked her face in the mirror. 'Do I really look that bad?'

'Pack it in, the pair of you,' said David, laughing at Jude's horrified expression.

'My darling girl, you could never look bad, no matter how hard you tried,' answered Claudia. 'Let's just say you've lost some of that Northern freshness.' She paused to nibble a bun but impatiently threw it back on the plate. 'Look at me, I've only been here half an hour and I've already got a belly-ache.'

'Then stop scoffing my bloody cakes,' said David.

'It's nothing to do with food,' retorted Claudia, pouring out more tea. 'It's the rank, fetid air of academia. Ugh!'

'God! It's been wonderful not having you chewing my balls off for these last two months!' said David.

'You're an anal case, David Osborne, locked up in your stuffy ivory tower. You need a slice of raw living before you choke on this refined air.'

David yawned flamboyantly. 'Give us a break, Claude.'

Jude interrupted their heckling. 'Claudia, what're you doing here? Nobody told me you were coming.'

'I have a secret assignation.'

'Tell me *all*!' laughed Jude. 'I'm starved of scandal.'

'I'm here to pick up my degree.'

'What's so scandalous about that?'

'She's up to something, Jude, it's written all over her scheming face. Out with it, Claude.'

'A hundred quid,' she answered evasively.

'For what?' David asked suspiciously.

'For dropping my gown and revealing all at the Degree Ceremony.'

David stared at her, genuinely horrified. '*No*! Not even you would go that far.'

Claudia shook her head.

'Wouldn't I? Jonathan bet me a hundred quid I wouldn't do it. I will, of course, I just need evidence . . .?' Her

voice trailed away as she looked from one to the other.

'Forget it,' cried David. 'Whatever you're doing, count me *out*!'

Jude glanced from his flustered face to Claudia.

'What sort of evidence?' she asked.

'A photograph or two and I win the bet.'

'*No*!' repeated David flatly.

'Well, I didn't expect you to say yes, but Jude might. What d'ya reckon, Jude?'

'I reckon you're crazy. You can't just stroll into the Senate House stark naked, you'd be locked up.'

'Don't be silly. I'll wear a skirt and blouse under my frumpy old graduate gown to start with and offload them at the first opportunity.' She smiled wickedly. 'By the time I reach the Senate House I'll be starkers under the gown . . .'

'Stop it,' groaned David, clamping his hands over his ears. 'I don't want to hear another word!'

'Why?' Claudia asked. 'You're not doing it!'

'I swear you'll get arrested,' he added.

'I have no intention of getting arrested. I'll do the dirty deed then hoof it, fast!'

'Naked, of course?'

'No, Jude will be there, with camera and gown, providing me with a speedy getaway.'

'I won't!' she yelped, spilling her tea all over the sofa. 'Not even for money,' she added, seeing Claudia's scheming expression.

'I wasn't thinking of money,' said Claudia, smoothing her soft leather jacket. 'Something along the lines of this jacket in exchange for your photographic services?'

Jude eyed the beautiful jacket. 'You rat, Claude!'

'I know. Just try it for size,' said Claudia, whizzing it across to Jude who was into it like a flash.

'Oh . . . it's wonderful,' she murmured as she fingered the pattern of silver studs around the shoulders.

'Bribery!' David cried.

'A fair exchange,' said Claudia. 'Don't mind if I hold on to the booty until after the deal's done?'

'Probably sensible,' said Jude, handing the jacket back with a last fondle. 'Otherwise I might be tempted to keep the goods and leg it.'

'Well, let's not take any chances,' said Claudia. 'Now are we agreed on this dirty deed?'

Jude nodded slowly. 'I suppose so,' she answered. 'Come too, David? It might be a laugh.'

'No bloody way!' he answered.

'You're just worried about your snow-white reputation,' Claudia teased.

'Too right. I'm always worried about something when you're around.'

'Wimp!'

'I'll tell you what, though, you can borrow my camera.'

'That's big of you,' Claudia answered.

'As long as I can sell the negatives to *Penthouse*.' He ducked low as a rock bun headed straight for his head.

'It's funny to think an academic gown and a mortar board could turn anybody on,' Claudia mused.

'Depends who's wearing it,' Jude said. 'I'd run a mile if it were David's tutor.'

'I'd run a mile if it were David!'

'Thank you and bugger off, Claude!' he said, clearing away the tea things.

'Not so fast,' said Claudia, taking hold of his arm. 'Can I take you two out to dinner tonight?'

David's face fell and Jude could see he was genuinely disappointed.

'Sod it, Claude. I've got to see my supervisor tonight.'

'Why tonight?'

'Because he's leaving tomorrow for Albania.'

'Don't tell me, he's off to study the sex life of the lesser spotted Slavic poet?'

David smiled wearily.

'Claude, believe me, I'd cancel it if I could.'

'You work too hard,' she answered with uncharacteristic gentleness. 'Are we on, Jude?'

'Definitely.'

'Seven-thirty, Porters' Lodge, OK?'

David burst out laughing as Jude's face fell. 'Not the dreaded *Porters' Lodge*!' he cried, putting his hand on his mouth in an expression of feigned horror.

Claudia looked nonplussed. 'Did I say something funny?'

David shook his head. 'No, it's just that Jude's been avoiding the porters since the day she arrived.'

'Avoiding Wilf and Mr Greenhalgh? Why?' she asked, turning to Jude, incredulous.

'I just get the impression they don't approve of me,' Jude answered, blushing slightly now that her secret was out.

'What *are* you talking about?'

'Jude thinks they disapprove of her moving in here with me,' David explained with an amused smile.

'They don't give a stuff.'

'I know that, you know that, but Jude refuses to believe it. She's been avoiding them by sneaking in through the back gate.'

'That's not bloody funny, David,' Claudia snapped, checking his laughter. 'You should have sorted it out right from the start.'

'Me! It's not *my* problem.'

'Of course it's your problem if it upsets Jude. All it needed was a couple of bottles of wine and a quiet word in Mr Greenhalgh's ear.'

'No way. I'm not bribing the porters.'

'It's not bribery, idiot, it's manners. Don't worry, Jude. I'll sort it. Seven-thirty, Porters' Lodge, OK?' she repeated.

Jude had one last stab. 'How about King's Parade?'

'*Porters' Lodge*,' Claudia insisted, standing up and stretching like a long, thin Siamese cat. 'Now I'm off to Jonathan's

room - it's the nearest I'm going to get to him for a long time.'

'Isn't he due back soon?' David asked.

Claudia nodded. 'He was only going for a couple of weeks, to set things up at UCLA. That was over a month ago. Obviously the Californian sun has seduced him - and a few other things, knowing Jonathan.' She smiled bitterly, the light going out of her lovely, glowing face.

'Cheer up,' David said. 'He'll have to come back soon, even if it's only to vacate his room.'

Claudia nodded.

'Yes, you're right. That makes me feel so much better, David, to think he can vacate his room and me simultaneously. Better go. See you later, guys.'

Jude was sorry to see her suddenly so sad. 'Poor Claude, she's missing him.'

'Sweetheart, take my advice, don't try to understand that relationship,' warned David.

'Why doesn't she just fly out and see him? They'd have a ball out there together.'

David turned his mouth down. 'That would be very uncool.'

'Why?'

'Don't ask *me* to explain how crazy they are.'

'Try.'

He paused thoughtfully.

'OK, let's say Claude took it into her head to breeze into his new life. Jonathan would see that as an act of possession.'

'But she loves him and misses him. What could be more normal than wanting to be with him?'

'Jude, I agree with you! It's all a load of bullshit. Try telling that to *them* – not me.'

'Sorry, go on.'

'He's into personal freedom and Claude goes along with it because she's crazy about him. It's that or nothing.'

'It's so uncharacteristic of her to put up with stuff like that,' Jude said, looking out of the window into the court

below. Suddenly she started to giggle. Claudia was striding purposefully across the sacrosanct emerald lawn.

'Just look at her!'

David joined her by the window and cupped his hands to his mouth: 'Get off the grass!'

Claudia turned and stuck two fingers in the air.

'*Up yours*!' she cried and went on her way.

Jude ran a bath and hummed to herself as she washed her hair. How good that Claudia had turned up out of the blue. They'd got loads of catching up to do. Lucky David wasn't coming really, he'd never get a word in edgeways once they got started. Suddenly there was a tap on the bathroom door.

'Jude, it's me,' he called. 'Can I come in?'

'Hold on.'

She scrambled out of the bath to unlock the door. David smiled at the sight of her soapy body and the wet hair clinging in tendrils to her shiny face.

'Sorry to bother you,' he said as Jude sank back into the hot water.

'Don't be. I like it when you stop work to talk to me.'

'Jude,' he started hesitantly, 'seeing you so happy with Claude made me realise just how lonely you must've been these last few weeks.'

She didn't say anything but stared at the soap bubbles popping around her stomach.

'It took her routine bollocking to make me realise just how selfish I've been.' He stopped and fluffed up the water around her bobbing breasts. 'I'm sorry, love,' he murmured.

Jude took his hand and kissed it.

'David I did *choose* to be with you.'

'I know, but I'm sorry for neglecting you,' he said, kissing the top of her damp head.

Jude stood up and wrapped her arms around his neck.

'I love you!' she said, happy to see the smile back on his face. 'Now, please, stop worrying?'

'Oh, Jude,' he whispered as he kissed the length of her neck. 'I love you too . . .' He bent and kissed her nipples, soft and warm from the water. They rose to his delicate touch as she pushed eagerly against him, her arms moving up and down his body, tugging at his clothes.

'You beautiful, beautiful woman,' he murmured, caressing the curve of her smooth, rounded buttocks. 'Come here.' Still standing, he lifted her by the hips and raised her on to him. Curling her legs around his waist, she gasped as he pushed deep into her. Moving slowly, lingeringly, up and down his body, feeling for him, holding on to him, Jude moaned with delight. Kissing and calling out each other's name they came in an urgent rush of unexpected passion then crumpled on to the damp bathroom floor, smiling at each other.

'Now do you believe that I want to be with you?' she asked.

'Yes,' he murmured, ruffling her blazing hair. 'But I wouldn't mind a bit more convincing!'

'Not tonight, I'll be late for my date.'

'Quick! Go,' he said, pulling her to her feet. 'Don't give Claudia another excuse to hate me.'

'We'll have fun too,' she promised as he pulled on his trousers and headed for the door.

He turned and winked cheekily. 'I thought we just had?'

David watched her cross the Old Court and run lightly up the path towards the Porters' Lodge. With her blazing golden hair and lovely body she was breathtaking and his heart suddenly constricted with fear. Jude had become so precious to him. What if she were to leave him? The thought of returning to his old life, without her warmth and vibrancy was intolerable. Sometimes he would stare at her as she slept and wonder at his own good fortune; she was so beautiful and she loved *him*. In the short time that he'd known her he'd felt the power of her love tapping springs of energy in him that he'd never even known existed. Life without her was unthinkable. The very

thought of it made him shiver, as if somebody had walked over his grave. He smiled after her disappearing shape, silhouetted against the evening sun, then turned his face away from the light, back to the books piled up on his desk.

Jude saw Claudia through the lodge window, sprawled across the desk wearing black silk shorts and the much coveted leather jacket. With her silver hair spilling around her shoulders and a thick band of silver clasped around her throat, Claudia looked devastating. Mr Greenhalgh was chatting to her while Wilfred brewed up in the back room, all the time casting lascivious glances at Claudia's long legs. Jude dithered around in the shadowy gateway praying that Claudia would breeze out of the lodge but of course she didn't. She spotted Jude, skulking outside, flung open the door and yanked her into the smoky warm lodge. Jude trembled at the sight of Mr Greenhalgh. He in return glared at her, hardly bothering to hide his irritation.

'Meet my sister!' cried Claudia, pulling her close. 'Lady Judith Langham!'

Mr Greenhalgh's jaw dropped no further than Jude's who gasped audibly at Claudia's whopping big lie. Wilfred, without being told to, instantly set another cup on the tray while the Head Porter rearranged his face into a polite, smiling expression.

'Well, well,' he smarmed. 'We've been seeing a lot of this young lady recently, haven't we, Wilf?'

Wilf nodded, goggle-eyed.

'Jude's been staying with a friend of mine,' continued Claudia. Mr Greenhalgh's expression suggested that he didn't need to be told that. 'My idea, really, I wanted somebody to keep an eye on her.' She smiled at Jude as if she were a three year old then turned a deeply concerned face to Mr Greenhalgh. 'She's a bit of an innocent really.'

'Yes, I can see that.'

'Do you mind her being here?' purred Claudia.

Mr Greenhalgh and Wilf looked deeply hurt.

'Us, mind? Never.'

Jude's eyebrows shot up. Bloody liars, she thought.

'Though it would have helped if Her Ladyship had informed us of her family connections,' he added quickly. 'I mean, any relative of *yours* is always welcome in my lodge.'

Wilfred, determined not to be left out of the action, set down the tin tray loaded with Silver Jubilee mugs.

'She's not like you, though,' he said, nodding towards Jude as if she weren't really there. 'Bit vague, like.'

They all stared at Jude, who blinked like a startled bird.

'Biscuit, dear,' said Wilfred, cautiously holding up a packet of Digestives.

Jude shook her head and turned to Claudia, willing her to leave, but Claudia was feeling in her top pocket for a hip flask.

'Something to spice the tea?' She smiled and poured a large dollop into each of the mugs. 'Daddy's second marriage,' she explained, nodding towards Jude. 'Different mothers.' Claudia's voice dropped confidentially. 'Different stock, rather nervy.' They all turned again to Jude and nodded sadly. She felt a great wave of hysterical laughter rising up inside her and quickly grabbed her mug and knocked back the hot tea and brandy.

'Cheers!' she cried.

'Cheerio then,' said Mr Greenhalgh.

'Bottoms up,' added Wilfred lustily.

'So,' continued Claudia as the men set down their mugs and licked their lips, 'you'll look after her for me?'

'Absolutely,' promised Mr Greenhalgh. Wilf nodded and smiled foolishly.

'Promise,' he said, eyeing his empty mug and yearning for more.

'I knew you'd understand,' said Claudia, gently drawing Jude away with one hand while leaving a crisp twenty pound note on the tray with the other. Mr Greenhalgh instantly covered the note with his chipped Jubilee mug.

'We'll treat her like she was one of our own,' he promised.

Claudia blew him a big kiss.

'Knew you would!' she said, and gently steered Jude out of the lodge into King's Parade.

The two porters watched them through the window.

'Got a few screws loose, has that one!' snuffed Wilfred, nodding towards Jude, bent double in the street.

'Barmy,' muttered Mr Greenhalgh and swiftly pocketed the twenty pound note. Wilfred scowled and peevishly polished off the dregs of the brandy.

The two girls tottered down King's Parade, laughing so much they had to hold on to each other for support.

'God, Jude!' hooted Claudia. 'You were wonderful!'

'Wonderful? It came all too easy after you'd introduced me as the family idiot!'

'They'll look after you now,' Claudia assured her.

'I was afraid you'd say that.'

In the brasserie Claudia ordered a bottle of Moet, half of which they drank as they negotiated their way around the elaborate menu.

'Right, I'm ready,' said Claudia as she hungrily tore up a bread roll. 'Snails, lobster and a mixed salad. What about you?'

'Definitely not snails,' groaned Jude. 'I'll have grilled feta and a hot chicken salad.'

Claudia ordered with effortless ease. Her confident, assured manner vividly reminded Jude of Lucius. She was suddenly tempted to ask Claudia if she knew the Carmichaels but thought better of it. The least said about that episode in her life the better.

'What're you thinking of?' asked Claudia, seeing Jude's brooding expression.

'You,' she answered truthfully.

'Good, I'll drink to that.'

They chinked glasses and sipped their wine

'Has David been ghastly?'

'Ghastly? What do you mean?'

'I know what he's like when he's got his head down. Won't eat or talk or fuck. Can't sleep - manic!'

'*Claudia*!' cried Jude, genuinely shocked.

'Come on, Jude – we both know what he's like.' She paused and gave Jude a candid stare. 'Don't we?'

'I'm not going to talk about David as if he were a piece of meat.'

Claudia shrugged. 'Neither am I.'

The waiter appeared with a plateful of snails and Claudia instantly forgot about David.

'Mmmm, let's eat,' she drooled.

Claudia's appetite was big and healthy, like her dynamic personality. She demolished the snails in no time then busied herself poking around in the shells, searching out the last bits of wine and garlic sauce.

'Have you decided yet what you're going to do?' she asked as she scoured her plate with a bread roll.

'No, though I think about it quite a lot.'

'Promise me you won't ever teach?'

Jude laughed but saw that Claudia was in earnest. 'What's so bad about teaching?'

'Just say you won't? I've seen too many brilliant women take up teaching just to facilitate their domestic arrangements. Talented women who fade away as they try to content themselves with second-rate academic husbands.'

The waiter brought their second course and Claudia sucked a lobster claw clean then glared at its pincers.

'It's such a waste of good women, Jude.'

'They're probably not too happy about it either.'

'So why do it? Why let men have it all?'

'Love, Claude. We all do odd things for love.' She knew Claudia couldn't argue with that one. 'I thought I might do research but David's put me right off it.'

'Thank God! You should act.'

'Me, act? No thanks.'

'With your face and voice, you'd be a sensation.'

'No, I could never act. Anyway, I wouldn't want to What I would really like is the idea of specialist research, as long as it's not academic.'

'What about television research? You'll end up presenting, whatever you say.'

Jude stopped eating. 'Why didn't I think of that?'

'TV presenter? Yeah, it's a brilliant idea!'

'No, television research. I know the Beeb take a handful of graduate trainees every year.'

Claudia interrupted her. 'You've missed the boat, sweetheart. They've already had this year's graduate selection. I should know, the buggers turned me down.'

'Why?'

'Apparently I was too forceful at the interview,' she snorted derisively into her champagne.

'That's ridiculous. The media need strong women.'

'But I'm something of an acquired taste. Maybe I'll have better luck with the independent companies. I've applied to London Weekend Television they're looking for a trainee researcher on the South Bank Show. That would be really something.' Claudia's eyes lit up. 'If that fails it's back to the drawing board: a media training course at some ghastly poly. The last thing I want is another bloody year at college!'

'You must stand a good chance with LWT,' said Jude. 'You've got all the right credentials.'

Like her, Claudia had got a first in her finals but Jude meant more than simply academic credentials. Claudia had the right background and contacts. She had style, independence, searing wit – and that seductive but elusive wannabe quality

'The Beeb were mad to turn you down.'

'That's what I thought. Anyway, we're talking about you You could try the independent companies too. I hear Granada are looking for a couple of bright grads to train up.'

Jude's face dropped. 'Claude, I've only just moved South!'

'For keeps?' She asked pointedly.

'I don't know,' Jude said, evading the question. 'I wouldn't mind coming back here, after Venice, as long as I don't have to live in King's again.'

'Forget this place and go with the job,' Claudia advised. 'I'll try and get hold of a copy of *Aerial*. You never know, there might be the odd vacancy going at the Beeb.'

'What's *Aerial*?'

'The BBC's internal paper, with all the job ads.'

'Do you think I'd really stand a chance?' asked Jude. 'I've never been involved in any kind of journalism. Politics was more my thing.'

Claudia absently watched the flickering candle in the middle of the table. 'Did you have a students' radio programme in Leeds?'

'Yes, but I never worked on it.'

'Pity, that could have been useful. Jonathan and I produced a twice-weekly radio programme for students last year. It's the best experience, knocking out the real thing to a deadline.'

'I've never seen a radio station in Cambridge.'

'It's here all right, just off Station Road. BBC Radio Cambridgeshire, heard of it?'

'Not in the West Riding!'

Claudia suddenly hit the table with her hand.

'That's your way in,' she cried. 'Local radio.'

'Don't be silly, I don't know anything about this area.'

'Get the job, then worry about the area,' Claudia said, draining her glass. 'I'm sure a couple of people gave in their notice just as I was leaving Radio Cambridgeshire. They may not have interviewed yet and could be looking for a junior researcher - that's about all they could afford anyway.'

'But what about you, Claude?' Jude asked. 'Surely you should apply too?'

'No way. I've finished with Cambridge for good.' She rolled wax from the candle between her thumb and finger. 'I'll call in at the radio station tomorrow and check it out.'

'You'll have no time for popping into radio stations tomorrow,' Jude reminded her.

Claudia smiled slowly. 'Now listen up. You do the right thing by me and you'll be Director General of the BBC by September. Lots of risque poses: the leg, the thigh, the bared breast.'

'I'm losing my bottle already.'

'Good,' said Claudia, hailing the waiter. 'Time to order another.'

After dessert they sat and drank coffee and brandy. It was only then that Claudia started to talk about Jonathan.

'I miss him.'

'Why don't you throw caution to the wind and fly out to LA.?'

Claudia shook her head. '*No way*,' she said, slowly and emphatically. 'It's bad news to hassle Jonathan Raphael.'

Jude looked mutinous.

'You think he's a shit, don't you?'

'A selfish shit,' Jude admitted.

'Well, unfortunately, he's all I want.' Claudia stared moodily about the restaurant. 'He's like no other man I've ever known, like no relationship I've ever had. It's not just that he's a powerful lover, and is he good . . .' Her eyes clouded dreamily. 'Believe me, he can take you places you never knew existed.'

Jude blushed, not at Claudia's words but at her own reaction to them. She could have been describing Lucius. Reaching down to kiss her, his body like cool silk touching hers, his weight just right between her open legs. Taking her to places *she'd* never even dreamt of. She wanted to shout, 'No, stop! I don't want to remember.' Instead she listened spellbound

'Unfortunately, it's not just sex, Claudia continued. 'He's brilliant, Jude, totally brilliant. The speed of his ideas and the way he can turn them around is *so* exciting. Sometimes I could have an orgasm just listening to him. Watching him talk turns me on. The way he looks with his dark eyes flaming and

passionate, his hair all tumbled about his face.' She sipped her brandy and added, 'He's also got the most phenomenal body. Perfect in all its parts. Oh, God! Don't give me one of your pained looks, I know, I'm pathetic.'

Jude smiled. 'No. You love the guy. I just wish he'd let you love him the way you want to, instead of screwing things up just for the sake of his fashionable principles.'

'He's terrified of conventional relationships,' Claudia explained. 'The irony is I used to be too until I fell in love with him. All I can think of these days is bridal veils and wedding bells.'

'Come on, Claude. Don't give me that.'

'Let's just say I'd die for a conventional weekend date with him. Anything's better than hanging about waiting for his phone call. Bastard! I bet he's screwing some gorgeous LA chick with perfect tits and a list of contacts that'll keep him dangling.'

'Knock off the brandy,' Jude advised. 'It's softening your brains.'

Characteristically ignoring good advice, Claudia took another slug. 'David's good for you, isn't he?' It wasn't a question, more of a statement.

'Yes,' Jude answered cautiously.

'Good. We were lousy together. He must've told you it never worked?'

'He said it wasn't very good.'

'It was a disaster!' laughed Claudia. 'All blab and no action, that was our problem. Sex is such a strange unfathomable thing.'

Jude busied herself folding the hem of the tablecloth. She had no intention of admitting there were times when she worried about their love-making. She had a need for David, a tender, caring need that could blaze into lust, but there was something missing. She knew it was the thing she was afraid of – passion. She'd known it with Lucius Carmichael but couldn't engender it with David. She felt as if she'd been

allowed to taste the forbidden fruit of Eden, but couldn't try it again.

'Yabber, yabber, yabber,' continued Claudia. 'That's what David and I were best at.'

'You and Jonathan never stop talking either.'

'We do in bed and that's when it matters. I wish I could get into his bed right now. Lie in his arms, smell him . . .'

'Stop it, Claude, you'll make yourself worse.'

'*Personal freedom*!' Claudia said, on a roll of self-pity. 'He thinks it's the only way to conduct a modern relationship.'

'How much space does he need? He's halfway across the world as it is!' Jude laughed.

'I've been too clever by half,' Claudia admitted. 'We kind of planned, without verbalising anything definite, you understand, to take a holiday before he left for the States.' She sighed heavily. 'I didn't like to do anything as uncool as talk arrangements, that would be far too contrived, but where has all my subtle buggering about got me? Fucking nowhere! He goes off to the States. Lots of mutual respect, enough personal space to bring on an attack of agoraphobia. Bottom line – no fun holiday.' She put an imaginary gun to her head and pulled the trigger.

'Have you ever thought that he might be just as disappointed as you are?' asked Jude.

'No way. Jonathan's too much of a pragmatist – things are what they are and that's that. Maybe I'll feel better when I've got a job. At least I won't be eating my heart out for him every waking minute of the day.'

'Of course you will,' Jude assured her. 'You'll be too preoccupied with Melvyn Bragg to trouble about Jonathan Raphael!'

Claudia shook her head. 'No, Jude. There's nobody in the world like Jonathan.'

They talked until gone midnight then walked home through the dark, winding streets. When they passed Wilfred, owl-eyed in the Porters' Lodge, Claudia threw him a dozen rapturous kisses.

'Night, ladies,' he mumbled.

'Darling Wilfie, night!' she crooned.

'Pack it in!' Jude whispered. 'He'll think you fancy him.'

'Oh, I do! I fancy *everybody* tonight!' laughed Claudia. In the courtyard, heavy with the perfume of roses and honeysuckle, they hugged each other tight and giggled like school girls.

'Go to bed,' Jude mumbled. 'Tomorrow's a busy day.'

'That's right. I must take my clothes off in front of the Provost!' Claudia smiled at the moon and started to wriggle out of her T shirt. 'I love taking my clothes off! Come on Jude, let's go for a midnight swim.'

'No! Go to bed, for crying out loud.'

'Tomorrow then,' said Claudia. 'Senate House, three o'clock, Promise?'

'I'll be there.'

Jude found David slumped over his desk, head on his hands, snoring into the *Collected Works of Lord Byron*. Smiling at the sight of him, she switched off his desk light and gently steered him across the room into the bedroom. As she undressed him he mumbled in English and Italian: '*La Biblioteca di Venezia* . . . gotta find that poem. Bloody Byron . . . oh, Jude.'

'Yes, yes,' she soothed as she climbed into bed beside him. 'Rest, love, rest.'

Holding on to her David fell into a deep sleep but Jude tossed restlessly all night. The brandy and coffee kept her wide-eyed for hours and when she did sleep her dreams were haunted by the sobbing figure of Claudia, chasing Jonathan across a flat landscape dense with black mist.

When Jude awoke to the bright light of day she felt sick and hung over.

'I wish I'd never had that brandy,' she groaned as she teetered on the edge of the bed.

'Coffee?' called David from the sitting room.

'Don't shout,' she begged, holding on to her head with both hands.

'I should have warned you about old Claude,' said David, setting down a pot of fresh coffee and kissing Jude lightly on the forehead. 'She can drink like a trooper. Have this.' He handed her a steaming mug of black coffee. As she sipped the scalding liquid her head slowly cleared. 'Jude, you look wrecked. Go back to bed and sleep it off.'

'No, I'll walk it off,' she said. 'David, you haven't forgotten about my appointment with Claudia, have you?'

'No. I was hoping you had.'

'You must be joking!' giggled Jude and stopped immediately. 'Ah! Don't make me laugh, my head's splitting open.'

'It's not too late to back out, you know. Claude's a terrible bully when it comes to getting her own way.'

'No, I've promised. Anyway part of me wonders if she'll really do it.'

'Don't kid yourself, Jude – she'll do it.'

Jude dressed then wandered down the sunny Backs to King's private pool. Hiding among a noisy family she sneaked in unnoticed and after ploughing ten lengths up and down the pool felt normal again. She walked into town through the market and bought cheese and fruit for lunch which she ate on a bench outside Great St Mary's church. It was a busy Degree Day. At about two o'clock lines of graduates streamed by, heading for the Senate House. Quarter of an hour saw each batch in and honoured, then out again. For a brief, unique moment they were loved and applauded by parents, academics and tourists alike. Snapped by a thousand Leicas, it was a moment of fleeting glory before the reality of unemployment set in.

I'm beginning to think like Claudia, thought Jude as she waited nervously for the King's batch to show up. Shading her eyes against the sunshine, she stood on tip-toe and peered over the crowd that filled the lawn and pavement all the way up King's Parade.

Just after three she spotted Claudia's group, solemn in the

heat. Headed by the Proctor and University dignitaries, they progressed at a stately pace along the Parade. Her sharp eyes flicked up and down the long line of sombrely clad graduates, all in black except for the starched relief of white shirts and blouses. Jude knew that every graduate's outfit would be checked before the procession moved off. Claude planned to wear something she could slip off and discard in less than thirty seconds, but would she have the guts to go through with it?

Suddenly she spotted Claudia at the back of the procession, head and shoulders above the group she was with, her silver-bright hair barely covered by the mortar board she wore at a saucy angle. As Claudia passed by she winked and smiled widely. With an artful shrug she allowed the gown to slip over her silky-brown shoulder and there wasn't a single doubt in Jude's mind – Claudia was stark naked underneath her graduate robe. Claudia's gown, like everybody else's, overlapped slightly at the chest then parted just above the knee. Other graduates had theirs open to reveal suits and skirts but Claudia's just met where it was necessary. Her long legs flashed, scissor-slim against the dark serge, and on her feet she wore shiny black patent leather high heels which twinkled cheekily among the sensible brogues and sturdy court shoes. Heads turned and cameras flashed but they weren't all for the Proctor in his rich, ermine gown. Claudia didn't need Jude's amateur skills to provide photographic evidence. Nearly every tourist with a camera was snapping the beautiful blonde striding sexily up the steps of the Senate House. Suddenly the gown slipped slightly. Jude gasped.

This is it! she thought, and started snapping, but Claudia swanned on, holding the gown over her breast and crotch. Jude's hands trembled but she continued shooting as Claudia entered the Senate House. The lawn quickly emptied as proud parents followed, eager to see the Presentation Ceremony. Jude sat by the railings with the sun on her face, wondering if the leather jacket was worth all this angst. But before she

had time to do a runner the heavy doors of the Senate House swung back and they were all out again. The audience spilled out in a bright bubble of pastel colours and summer hats, the graduates behind, darkly clad, their faces creased with smiles of relief now the formalities were over. On the lawn they gathered, where everybody kissed and cooed, delighted with themselves and their offspring. Jude leapt to her feet, camera poised.

'Let's get it over with!' she muttered and waited, hardly daring to breathe.

As Claudia reached the great stone urn in the middle of the Senate House lawn she let the gown slither to her ankles. There was a stunned silence broken only by the steady click-click-whirl of Jude's camera then a long, drawn out wolf whistle followed by a cry of, 'F-u-c-k-i-n-g h-e-l-l!' from the ice-cream seller on the pavement, just outside the railings.

The crowd surged forward, eager for a closer view. Claudia swept her long, lithe body into an elegant curtsey and made to pick up her gown but the college bull-dogs were on her in a flash. Two dark-suited men with bowler hats and flaming red faces grabbed her arms and a third shoved the gown around her. The crowd twittered and tittered, thrilled and stunned by this unexpected turn of events. An enterprising photographer was running around taking last minute shots of Claudia's disappearing bottom, while a journalist picked up all the gossip on the Hon. Claudia Langham from any student who admitted to knowing her. With Claudia's dramatic exit Jude swiftly put the camera into her bag and, breathing a sigh of relief, beat a quick retreat across Clare Fellows' Garden and through the back gate into King's. She waited in David's empty rooms for what seemed like hours. What had happened to Claudia? Where was she? Could she have been arrested? Perhaps Jude should have stayed close by and helped but her first priority had been to get away with the vital photographic evidence.

Too hot and bothered to stay indoors, she went outside

and sat on the wall by the river. Happy families were bursting out of punts and canoes. Grannies and aunties sweating in crimplene weighed down the prows, and self-consciously bright young things balanced precariously on the sterns. Champagne flowed, smoked salmon sandwiches curled in the heat, and the sun beat down on red-hot faces. Jude dangled her feet in the rippling green water and willed Claudia to appear. Her prayers were answered with a loud trumpeting in her ears.

'Da-da-da-da!'

'Oh!' Jude nearly tumbled headlong into the river. 'Where have you been?'

'I've been disentangling myself from the hands of those fascist bastards.' Claudia pointed to the tower of the Senate House as if it were Hitler's wartime headquarters. 'When they had me alone there was more slap and tickle than the centre pages of *Penthouse*. *Wankers*!' she yelled at the top of her voice. Disapproving frowns drifted across the river from a family who thought she was addressing them. A gaggle of punks in a beat-up rowing boat raised their lager cans and nodded sympathetically.

'Right on, darlin'!' they cried.

'I can't take any more aggro,' Jude said, and quickly steered Claudia away from the busy river.

In the peaceful cool of Jonathan's room Jude flopped into a chair and wound the film off the roll.

'Don't lose this. It's taken ten years off my life.'

'Ta. Here's your reward,' said Claudia and threw the leather jacket across the room, but Jude smiled and threw it back.

'You'll be on the front page of every tabloid tomorrow morning. You won't need my film as proof, I can promise you that.' The jacket came flying back to her.

'A deal's a deal. Anyway, I couldn't have done it without your moral support!'

'*Moral*!' Jude hooted, wriggling into the jacket and preening

herself in the long mirror. 'There was nothing moral about what you did.'

Claudia shrugged.

'I'm going to take a shower,' she said. 'Be a pal and make some tea.'

While she waited for the kettle to boil Jude picked her way along the shelves, curiously examining Jonathan's books. They were more diverse and eclectic than David's – electronics, physics, astrology, architecture, politics, film and Zen. Though the rooms had identical lay-outs Jonathan's seemed bigger. It was tidier too, with a strangely intense atmosphere as if he was still there She brewed the tea then sat in the armchair by the open window thinking about him. It was odd how little she knew of him, even though her first impressions of Cambridge had been formed by him and Claudia. Rich, talented and beautiful, they oozed glittering bright success. Sitting in his chair, surrounded by his books, she was drenched with an overwhelming sense of him. She shuddered. His spirit was there, as eerie as a ghost, as warm as a lover.

'Is that tea ready yet?' Claudia yelled from the bathroom. Jude jumped sky-high.

'Tea? Tea! Oh, yes, it's ready!'

Claudia walked in, wrapped in a big bath towel, and Jude tensed, suddenly guilty, as if she'd been discovered reading one of Jonathan's letters rather than just thinking of him.

'What's up? You look like you've seen a ghost!'

'I have, laughed Jude, 'you've got some clothes on at last.' Claudia took her mug of tea and lay flat on the floor, her hair splayed out around her head, steaming in the sunshine.

'Was it worth it?' Jude asked.

'Yeah.' A slow smile spread across Claudia's face. 'You should've seen their faces!'

'Don't kid yourself, I did! I only hope Jonathan coughs up.' Claudia stood up to drop the film into her bag.

'With all this evidence, he's got to.' She took a newspaper

out of her bag and handed it to Jude. 'I picked this up from the radio station this morning.'

Jude flicked through the pages.

'I don't understand what half of this is!' she laughed. 'Boom operator, puller, VTR, floor manager, special effects department – '

'Try that,' said Claudia, tapping an ad she'd circled in pencil.

Jude sat bolt upright and read aloud: '"Junior Researcher for afternoon programme, must have strong links with town and county. One-year contract, starting end of September. Apply, Programme Controller, BBC Radio Cambridgeshire."' Her excited voice slowly tailed off. 'Terrific! Where do I fit in that job description?'

Claudia didn't answer but cast about the floor, looking for something.

'Have you seen my knickers?'

'Your knickers! You haven't had 'em on all day.'

'I had some when I arrived,' said Claudia, reaching under one of the cushions on the sofa. 'These'll do.' She wriggled into what looked like three bits of cerise ribbon. 'What d'you think?'

'The knickers? Great.'

'The job, of course.'

'Hopeless. I don't have any links with the town and hardly know the county. In fact I only know you and David.'

'You know Wilfred and Mr Greenhalgh!'

Jude couldn't believe she was hearing right.

'That'll help,' she scoffed.

'It will. Old Greenhalgh has been running the college underground for years. He's the university godfather, can guarantee you anything – as long as you're prepared to pay, of course.'

'Could he stretch to a job at the BBC?'

'No, but he could find you a camel in the middle of the night!'

'Oh, come on, be serious, Claude.'

'I am,' she said, suddenly thoughtful. 'They'll be looking for people who can develop and expand good programmes. People who can bring in new blood – '

'People with *contacts*.'

Claudia ignored her. 'They'll want somebody bright and imaginative. That's OK, you've got stacks of talent.'

'No, Claude, forget it. I don't have the right kind of contact book and they'll suss it straight away.'

'Bullshit! You know a film director.'

'*Jonathan*!'

'You have a string of academic and literary contacts.'

'Who?'

'David of course – and your university links,' continued Claudia blithely. 'The gardeners and porters.'

'Mr Greenhalgh,' sniffed Jude.

'The market traders.'

'Oh, you mean the cheese man?'

'And you have that charming Northern knack of getting to know people,' finished Claudia.

'That's a nice way of saying I'm a nosy cow!'

'Jude, they're not looking for the Vice-Chancellor's wife to research the programmes, they want somebody just like *you*!' She opened her mouth to speak but Claudia threw the newspaper at her.

'We've got to sort out old Greenhalgh,' she said, half to herself. 'Get the old boy network moving.'

'There must be more to the start of my brilliant career than greasing up Mr Greenhalgh.'

Claudia picked up the pieces of newspaper scattered around Jude and glanced again at the advert.

'You should be relieved they haven't advertised for an experienced researcher, then you'd really be up against tough competition.'

Jude raised her eyes to the ceiling.

'Wow! I'm so relieved,' she answered cynically.

'It means you're in with a chance – as long as we gild the lily a bit.'

'Lies!'

'Exaggeration,' Claudia conceded. 'Local radio may be small potatoes and rotten awful pay but once you're in, you're in.' She stared out of the window for a few minutes, smiling at the antics of some kids, diving under punts packed with girls in straw hats and Laura Ashley dresses.

'There will be some competition – the first rung on the ladder is always a crowded place but with your face, that smile and a devastating CV, it's in the bag.' She stood up and stretched as if the whole thing were a fait accompli. 'Is there anything to eat in this place?'

Jude shook her head.

'How can you even think of food when your head's full of lies?'

'Chocolates!' cried Claudia dashing across the room. 'I bought you some.' She produced a box of Belgian chocolates from her rucksack and opened the top layer. 'You first.'

'No, thanks, but thanks for the thought.'

Claudia munched her way through a handful and continued her scheming.

'Lets go through other possible candidates,' she said, grabbing a pencil and paper and making a list. 'There's always a couple of somebody's friends who've always fancied a job on the telly – '

'Whoops! That sounds like me.'

'The inevitable secretary who'll see this as her big break. That's no big deal, not unless she's having an affair with the Controller, but I can check that out myself.'

'Do things get that steamy in local radio?' laughed Jude.

'You bet – wait till you meet the Controller! The serious competitors will be the experienced journalists, the disenchanted lecturers going through a mid-life crisis, maybe the odd writer, odd being the word, and that's about it. Piece of piss.'

'Where am I in this long list of has-beens?'

'You're unique. Bright, brainy and beautiful and . . .' she paused and smiled wickedly '. . . you're a writer!'

'You just said all the writers would be odd!'

'But not you. You've just finished an amazing English degree.' Claudia's eyes lit up as she recreated Jude. 'You're fresh, dynamic . . .' She stopped suddenly. 'Have you got any old essays and reviews?'

'Of course, but they don't amount to *War and Peace*.'

'That's fine. All we have to do is extend your intellectual skills into radio and maybe telly.'

Jude opened her mouth to complain.

'For God's sake, stop screaming and start listening!' Jude obediently shut her mouth on a chocolate.

'A couple of unsolicited scripts for The Archers would look nice and keen, maybe a Coronation Street script too.'

'The Nobel Award for Literature?' Jude threw in.

'Oh, and an Emmerdale Farm outline would be good – you being of hearty Northern farm stock and all that rural crap.'

Jude was glad of the sweet which clamped her jaws tight but didn't stop her eyes nearly bursting out of their sockets.

'Your own stage play would've been brilliant but there's no time for that now.'

Spluttering, Jude gulped down the chocolate. It was time to speak.

'Claudia, I haven't done any of these things.'

'I know, but you will. Surely you can knock out a script or two between now and the interview?'

'How?'

'By watching the bloody programmes for a start. Get to know the characters, copy the format. It's all dead easy, predictable stuff. Much less complicated than an English tripos paper!'

Jude nodded uncertainly.

'What about those reviews? Have you still got them?'

'Yes, somewhere.'

'Good, we can tart them up and add them to your CV. Anything else?'

Jude hesitated.

'Don't choose now to be modest!' begged Claudia.

'We did an amazing film course in the second year. I put together a sort of review sheet and it was published . . .'

Claudia's eyes lit up. 'That sounds more like it.'

'It was only in the student mag but it was pretty good, even if I say so myself.'

'Brilliant!'

'Don't get too carried away, it was all a bit amateurish.'

'It won't be by the time I've finished with it.'

'I hate the thought of lying,' Jude said.

'Who's lying?' Claudia replied. 'You'll have done all of these things by the time they get round to interviewing you.'

'I'd better start right now,' said Jude, suddenly galvanised.

'Right. Oh, and try the local paper too. Local radio has strong links with the daily rag.'

'What can I write about Cambridge?'

'First rule, never write about something you don't know about. Write about what you know, something you can knock out, like that!' she snapped her fingers.

'Sheep-farming?' Jude suggested, half-joking.

'That's a thought, if you could angle it locally.'

'How? It's all arable farming round here.'

'Go through the Yellow Pages and phone up every farmer until you find one with a flock of sheep, then use him to carry the article.'

Jude gulped. It would take a lot of nerve to do what Claudia suggested but she was beginning to see how it all might work.

'And here's another cunning move. If you can get a local shepherdess into the piece you could try sending it off to Woman's Hour. They're always casting around for some lively topical stuff during the summer.'

'How do you know all these things?'

'I had to do quite a bit myself when I was building up my interview portfolio,' she said, tongue in cheek. 'And I've helped other wilting violets fabricate their fragile CVs,' she added cheekily. 'Media's a tough world. You've gotta get down and dirty from time to time. One thing's for sure, you've got to have a lot of boats in this business and you've got to shove 'em all out at once. There's a good chance they'll all come back empty but then you think of something else.' She strode purposefully towards the door. 'Come on, let's go and pick up your application form.'

Jude burst out laughing. 'Only if you put some clothes on first!'

Radio Cambridgeshire was small and cosy, tucked away between office blocks and the Botanical Gardens. As they walked there Claudia told Jude about the weekly student programme she and Jonathan had created and edited for over a year.

'The worst thing about it was the title: Out of the Blue', she said with a self deprecating grimace. 'Apart from that it was brilliant. We had all the facilities available, could book studio time, use any freelance articles or reviewers we fancied, plus we had all the expertise of the old pros who'd been knocking out programmes for years.'

As they walked into the building Jude was instantly aware of Claudia's popularity. Everybody who passed her in reception stopped and chatted for a few minutes then she suddenly disappeared into one of the studios with the Station Manager. Jude sat alone, awkwardly reading back copies of *Aerial*, surreptitiously checking out the staff. She was struck by the average age – most of them looked younger than she. Maybe Claudia was right, perhaps she did have more to bring to the job than she credited herself with.

Claudia reappeared holding a bunch of application forms and a large portable tape recorder.

'Let's go and play at being Kate Adie,' she whispered. They

cycled to Newnham and in the quiet of the early evening lay by the river and went through the detailed application form.

'It's all the usual stuff,' said Claudia carelessly. 'Schools, college, languages, and that tiny bit in the middle where you squeeze in your life story.' She stuffed the form into Jude's bag. 'I leave that in your capable hands. Now to the business.' She picked up the tape recorder. 'Before I leave tomorrow you're going to be able to operate a UHER.' She flipped open the lid and wound a tape on to the spools. 'They still use these big machines in local radio, though at Broadcasting House they tend to use Sony Walkmans which have to be dubbed on to reel to reel for editing.'

'You're losing me, Claude.'

'OK, follow me,' said Claudia, slinging the leather strap of the UHER over her shoulder and walking towards the riverbank. Jude watched, fascinated as Claudia turned the row of knobs and dials on top of the machine.

'First I test the levels, it's normally around here, number five, then I switch it on, like so, and we can record river water, birdsong, the grass growing . . .' She held the mike at arm's length. 'Then I do my intro.' She took a deep breath, lifted the mike to the level of her chin and spoke into it. 'I talked this afternoon to Jude Summers, a North Country visitor, spending the summer in Cambridge. Jude, can you tell me your first impressions of the city?'

She held the mike out to Jude who just stared at it, mesmerised.

Claudia waited but Jude simply couldn't speak.

'Say something, for Christ's sake!'

Jude burst out laughing and Claudia switched off the machine.

'Sorry. I was completely tongue tied.'

'Most people are to start with,' said Claudia. 'That's why you've got to practise using this thing, every day, all day if possible. I'll leave it with you.' She wrapped the wires around the mike and handed the machine over

to Jude. 'Take care of it though, these things cost over a thousand quid.'

'Does it belong to the BBC?' Claudia nodded.

'I made a deal with the Station Manager. If I do some interviews for him in London, I get to borrow one of his machines for a month.'

'What sort of interviews?'

'Local talent made good, you know the sort of stuff. A couple of artists who've got exhibitions opening in the West End, a brilliant young ballerina from one of the fen villages who's just joined the corps de ballet at Covent Garden.'

'How does all this information filter through?' Jude asked

'It all comes through the daily news room meetings. There it's handed out to the appropriate producer or hungry freelancer – like me,' she added with a laugh. 'Fortunately summertime is pretty dead for local radio so they're open to suggestions for new material. Perfect timing for you to get your nose round the door.'

'But if I borrow your machine, what will you use?'

'No problem. A friend of mine in London has just bought his own. Jude, take the thing and stop dreaming up excuses.' She shoved the machine into her arms.

'It's really kind of you, Claude.'

'I know, I'm a brick! Now come on, interview me.'

Nervously Jude set up the machine. She managed to find the recording levels then dropped both tapes on the grass. Claudia calmly refitted them and started up the other.

'Don't worry, we all started somewhere.'

Giggling and teasing each other they spent the next hour on the riverbank and after several dummy runs Jude finally managed to interview a curious duck, a cyclist who fancied Claudia and a sweaty jogger who'd run out of breath and couldn't say a word. By the end of her first lesson she was beginning to get the hang of things.

'Come on, Claude. Let's interview that courting couple under the bushes.'

'No way! They're just getting to the good bit. Stop now, on a high. Anyway, I'm starving.'

'You're always starving!' laughed Jude, and interviewed Claudia all the way back on the worst places to eat in Cambridge.

As they walked into King's Jude suddenly realised how much she was going to miss Claudia.

'Thank you for helping me.'

'Forget it. I love dominating people.'

'You've inspired me, you know.'

'You won't say that when you find out how much the BBC pays junior researchers. Be warned, Jude, it's crap.'

'So what's the pull?' she asked.

'The buzz!'

They found David in his room with a wicked grin on his face.

'Look what I've got,' he said, holding high the *Evening News*. Spread across at least half of the front page was Claudia, naked on the Senate House lawn. She grimaced as she read the headlines.

'"Naughty King's Grad reveals all!"'

'Too late for regrets,' said David. 'Lucky you look gorgeous. My favourite bit is this here.' He pointed to a blurred figure. 'Jude legging it from the scene of the crime!'

'Stuff it!' cried Claudia, flinging the paper across the room. 'Let's go and have dinner, my treat.'

'My treat,' said David, springing to his feet in a flash. Jude grabbed him and held him tight.

'Quick, Claude, before he changes his mind.'

A couple of hours later they returned to King's, fairly sober, with work to do.

'What work?' quizzed David, but Claudia and Jude just smiled and hurried into Jonathan's room to fill in the BBC application form. Around midnight Jude checked it through for the third time.

'Is this really me?'

'Don't start dithering again,' yawned Claudia. 'It's all you, with just the teeniest bit of bullshit around the edges. Check it out tomorrow then stick it in the post and forget about it. Now, go through your homework.'

Jude took a deep breath and started.

'OK. I have to write an unsolicited script for Coronation Street, East Enders or something like that. When it's finished I have to send it off to the appropriate producer and keep one copy to show at the interview – assuming I get one.'

'You'll get one. Go on.'

'I have to write an article, unsolicited of course, for the local rag,' continued Jude.

'Check out if there are any sheep farmers, especially shepherdesses, hereabouts,' Claudia reminded her.

Jude nodded and continued with her list.

'Once I've written the article I've got to tart it up and record it for Woman's Hour.'

'Always keep copies,' interrupted Claudia. 'It's your only proof at the interview. Most unsolicited stuff goes straight in the bin but if it serves a purpose, who cares?'

'Thanks, Claude, you make it sound really worthwhile!'

'And practise with the bloody tape,' insisted Claudia. 'Here,' she said, holding out a pen. 'Let's see your signature on the bottom of the form.'

Jude signed and Claudia flopped on to the bed.

'I'm going to dream of Jonathan screwing other women,' she said moodily.

Jude bent down to kiss her.

'Good night, Claude – I hope you hear from him soon.'

Claudia sighed and smiled sadly.

'So do I, Jude. Oh, so do I!'

Chapter Four

It was quiet after Claudia had gone but there was no time for moping. A bank statement arrived informing Jude that she was fifty pounds overdrawn. Claudia had warned her that Radio Cambridgeshire would probably take weeks to organise an interview date, especially during the high summer when everybody was on leave. That's even if I get shortlisted, thought Jude anxiously. Clearly there was no time to waste – she needed a job right now.

She set off for the job centre but there was no temporary work available so she bought a copy of the *Evening News* and scoured the 'Situations Vacant' section. Nothing there either. Feeling desperate, she wandered through the city centre looking for job adverts in shop windows. Outside the Arts Cinema, the very last place she would have thought of, there was a discreet notice pinned up beside the 'What's on Tonight' poster. 'Temporary Usherette required until the beginning of September. Apply to Manager.' Twenty seconds later Jude was knocking on his door. He was having lunch but didn't mind. Over ham sandwiches and crisps the deal was done, on condition she could start right away. There was just time to kit her up in an overall twice her size then she was out in the foyer, tearing tickets and directing patrons to their seats. She sat through two showings of an arty, satanic thriller then ran home, terrified.

'Jude!' cried David as she stumbled in. 'Where have you been? I was just about to call the police.'

'I got a job at the Arts Cinema.'

'Great, so why didn't you phone?'

'There was no time, I started right away.' She fell on to the sofa beside him. 'Mind you, if I'd known they were showing a thriller I might have thought twice. I was hiding behind the blackout curtain most of the time. I'm sure I won't sleep a wink tonight.'

She needn't have worried. She was asleep before her head touched the pillow.

The days flew by and Jude discovered unexpected pleasure in her new job. The films varied throughout the week, though arty satanic thrillers from Eastern Europe did figure large in the cinema's repertoire that summer. After seeing half a dozen of them Jude hardened up and was able to guide people to their seats without wanting to hide underneath them. Occasionally she got free tickets for a movie and David joined her on the darkened back row. He too had taken a summer job, commuting back and forth to London, marking papers for the Open University. Jude had been furious with him when he'd broken the news.

'I thought we'd spend a little time together now that you've finished your wretched thesis,' she seethed. His thesis was now in the hands of a professional typist and would be bound and ready for delivery to the academic board at the start of the Michaelmas term. 'I didn't come to live *here*,' she stabbed an angry finger at his cluttered college room, 'just to watch you go back and forth to London every day.'

'I'm sorry, love,' he soothed. 'But the extra money will pay for our flights to Venice.'

Jude couldn't argue with his reasoning. They were both flat broke.

'I'll miss you,' she grumbled.

'We'll soon have all the time in the world together, I promise.' Venice beckoned like a glittering prize, bringing a reluctant smile to Jude's angry face.

'OK.'

A week after Claudia left a postcard arrived.

'I've been shortlisted for the South Bank job – fingers crossed.'

Five days later came an ecstatic phone call.

'Jude, I've got it!'

'Claude, congratulations! I knew you would.'

'I still can't believe it,' she admitted, quite uncharacteristically. 'They really grilled me – current affairs, political commitments, technical skills. Can you believe they even brought up the Senate House flash?'

'How on earth did they know?'

'They know everything.'

'What did you say?'

'I completely dried up.'

'That's not like you!'

'I know. Luckily they all thought it was very whacky. Somebody even suggested I'd stop at nothing for a good story.'

As Jude listened to Claudia's account of the interviews, three in all, her heart sank like a brick. It was much, much harder than she'd originally thought.

'Jude, you've gone very quiet. What's up?'

'I haven't heard a squeak from Radio Cambridgeshire.'

'So? Summer's lousy for jobs. The media go off to Tuscany and write about screwing each other under hot skies – talking of which . . .' She stopped to catch her breath.

'What, screwing?' Jude teased.

'No, hot skies – I'm off to India next week.'

'How on earth can you afford it?' Jude asked before she could stop herself.

'It's my dad,' Claudia answered, slightly edgy about her family's renowned wealth. 'He booked me a round trip as a reward for getting the job.'

'Wow! That's generous.'

'Now buck up. I promise you'll hear good news soon.'

Jude didn't. As the days passed she began to feel more and more pessimistic. She'd been an idiot to put all her eggs in one basket. What if Radio Cambridgeshire rejected her?

She'd have wasted weeks, possibly months, hanging around waiting for a refusal. It would have been a clever move to have applied for ten jobs - not just one. With Claudia gone and David commuting to London, Jude began to feel really isolated. She phoned Nell in the North but heard from her parents that she too had gone away. Jude was glad of her job. At least she had something to do and the bank manager had stopped bouncing her cheques

In the darkened cinema her days took on a pattern of dream-like unreality. She drifted up and down the aisles, her head full of fictitious characters and fantastical plots, ears ringing to the soundtrack. When Jonathan walked in one Friday afternoon she didn't even recognise him. The velvet curtain she was standing beside rippled and she automatically held out her hand.

'Ticket, please.'

Hot lips pressed into her palm. Smothering a shriek, she pushed the offender back through the curtain.

'You can't come in without a ticket!' she snapped.

'Jude, I don't want to come in, I want you to come out.' It was only when she heard his voice that she looked into the man's face.

'*You*!'

He laughed and kissed her on the cheek.

'What . . . what . . .?'

'What am I doing here?' he finished the sentence. 'Looking for you. Fancy dinner?' She shook her head.

'What about Claudia?'

'Claudia can't come,' he joked. 'She's in India.'

'Did you see her?' Stupid, thought Jude to herself. Of course he hadn't seen her but in her fantasy world of cinema anything was possible. Jonathan shook his head.

'No. Missed her by nearly two weeks. So much for surprises,' he added with a resigned shrug.

Jude felt like weeping.

'That's sad,' she muttered.

'Jude, you're taking this very personally,' he teased.

'I'm an incurable romantic,' she said as flippantly as she could manage. 'Anyway,' she hastily changed the subject, 'you look well.'

'California suits me.'

'I can see that.'

It wasn't just the suntan – he had a new style and confidence. LA had turned a good-looking young man into a complete stunner. There was a loud surge of music from the auditorium.

'Blimey, that's the end of the film. I've gotta go.'

'Can you make dinner?'

'Yes, but not till I've finished work. About eleven.'

'I can wait.'

He quickly dodged behind the blackout curtain as the audience pushed their way out, blinking as they stumbled into the sunshine. Jude closed the heavy exit doors then walked up the aisles, checking the seats.

'David's marking OU papers in London,' she said. 'He won't be back until tomorrow.' With her back to him Jude couldn't see Jonathan's delighted expression. 'You wouldn't believe what some people leave behind,' she said, holding up an empty condom packet.

'Please, spare me the details ' he said with a grimace. During her afternoon break they had a quick cup of tea in the cafe opposite.

'Tell me all,' she insisted.

'Jude, I don't know where to start.'

'Start with California. What's it like?'

'I'll draw it,' he said, and taking a pencil out of his pocket sketched out a map on his serviette. 'You've got the Sierra Nevada over here, the Pacific here, LA right there, and all around beautiful beaches, harbours and mountains. Oh, and the film school's here,' he added, marking the place with a cross.

Jude sighed into her steaming cup of Darjeeling

'Mixed in with all of that are the weirdest bunch of people on God's earth. Health freaks, Jesus freaks, addicts, psychopaths, movie stars, shrinks.' He paused and smiled. 'Jude, believe me, it's brilliant.'

'Do you go around singing Beach Boys songs all day?'

'Yeah, and I pump iron and date chicks.'

Before she could ask another question she caught sight of the queue forming outside the cinema.

'I'm on,' she said, and headed for the door.

Jonathan smiled as he watched her go. The faded nylon overall did nothing for her but she still sizzled with the same vitality he'd remembered. She was more confident, with the particular kind of Cambridge confidence that he was all too familiar with. It would be sad to see her sucked into the system, joining the army of streamlined wives who knew their partner's thesis better than their own bra size.

'Fucking place,' he growled, and strode out into the street.

He was waiting for Jude outside the cinema, just after eleven that night.

'The only place open is the Greek taverna,' he said.

'Great. I'm starving.'

They ordered lamb kebabs and Retsina, and while they waited for their wine Jude dropped her bombshell.

'By the way, you owe Claudia that hundred quid.'

Jonathan nearly choked. 'She did it?'

Jude nodded. 'I was chief witness, here's the proof.'

She reached into her wallet and brought out a photo of Claudia, naked on the Senate House lawn. Jonathan stared at it then roared with laughter.

'I should've known better.'

'Damn right you should.'

'She'll screw me for that hundred quid.'

'I should hope so too!'

The wine arrived and Jonathan poured. 'This is my goodbye visit to Cambridge,' he said, clinking his glass against hers.

'Come on, be sentimental,' she coaxed. 'Aren't you just the teeniest bit sad?'

'No way! I'm up to here . . .' he said, tapping his forehead '. . . in the history of James Joyce's favourite fuck word and Tennyson's bleeding *Idylls*. Who cares, for Christ's sakes?'

'You obviously cared,' she snapped before she could stop herself. Irritated with herself for breaking their happy mood she grew unexpectedly sharp. 'You *chose* to come here and you *chose* to stay. Now you've got your first-class degree and you've finished your doctorate you have the bloody cheek to knock everybody else who's doing exactly the same thing!'

'Mea culpa, Jude, but there's got to be a better way of proving your natural intelligence than some obscure piece of nothing that nobody will ever read.'

'There is. You could get a job and do it the hard way. A lot of my friends chose that route. Unfortunately they're mostly unemployed right now.' The waiter arrived with their kebabs and salad.

'OK, let's change the subject,' he said, 'before we throw food at each other. What've you been up to?'

Seeing he was making an effort, Jude's face softened.

'Oh, watching too many movies while I wait to hear from Radio Cambridgeshire.'

'Radio Cambridgeshire? Who put you on to that?' She opened her mouth to answer but he interrupted. 'Don't tell me. Claude?'

Jude nodded.

'She saw a job advertised in *Aerial* and set me up for it.'

'Good for her. Have you heard anything?'

'No, I'm beginning to doubt I ever will. Still, I'm a whizz with a TIVER these days, I've been interviewing everything that moves since Claudia loaned me one, and I've written a newspaper article and a couple of scripts for Coronation Street – unsolicited of course.'

'You mean business, don't you?'

'Yes, but my big mistake has been only applying for one

job. If Radio Cambridgeshire don't come up with something, it's back to the drawing board for me.'

'Short-listing takes forever in the summer. The whole of the BBC goes off to Tuscany to write a steamy novel.'

Jude laughed.

'That's what Claude said.'

Jonathan sipped his wine thoughtfully.

'You'd make a bloody good presenter.'

'She said that too!'

'Then go for it.'

'No, I much prefer the idea of researching — if I can get a job.'

'You will,' he said, raising his glass again.

'Success!'

'Mine or yours?'

As he drank Jude watched a silky sweep of hair fall across his brow, accentuating the high curve of his cheekbones and his strong, straight nose. She had an irresistible urge to push back the hair and touch the golden skin of his face. Suddenly she recalled the intensity of those moments in his room and shivered involuntarily.

'Somebody walk on your grave?'

'No,' she lied. 'Just sleepy.'

They had coffee in David's room. When Jude walked in from the kitchen Jonathan was flicking through David's books with a scowl on his face. She set down the coffee, determined to get to the bottom of his anger.

'It's a pity you two stopped being friends. David's still fond of you.'

'For old times' sake, maybe.'

'Lots of friendships are built on old times.'

'This one isn't,' said Jonathan, picking up his cup and walking to the open window. 'We just about stayed friends as undergrads then we made the fatal mistake of sharing a house in our first post-grad year. As David got into his

research he lost his fizz and intellectual freedom. He was like a doughty old don. So conventional and so desperate to be part of this shit!' He nodded towards King's Chapel, gilded silver in the moonlight. 'I became rebellious and questioned the establishment. That really pissed him off, I can tell you.' He walked back to Jude and put down his cup 'I should never have stayed in Cambridge to do my research, it made me hard and cynical. My supervisor persuaded me to hang in and I did admittedly in a grumpy, peevish sort of way, and now it's over.'

He gazed moodily around the room. 'Things got much worse when Claudia and I took up with each other. She and David both insisted that their relationship was completely over, and it was. But it really mattered that she came to me after him.' Jonathan suddenly stopped, his face set and tense. 'I'm tired, Jude. Good night.'

'Jonathan!' she called after him. 'I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you.'

'You haven't. Good night.'

When he'd gone Jude lay back in the sofa and stared up at the ceiling. She'd been told by both Claudia and David what a prickly man Jonathan was but until now had never experienced it first hand. She was surprised by his sudden exit and irritated too. She felt like going to his room, banging on the door and demanding an explanation. What gave him the right to walk out and leave her feeling guilty? Springing to her feet she strode across the room and leaned out of the window to stare at the river below. Breathing in the velvet softness of the warm night she realised she was probably over-reacting. She knew all about Jonathan the academic from David. The lover from Claudia. But what about the man himself? Nobody talked of his home, his family, where he came from. Jonathan never even let drop a hint of an accent. Fatigue overtook Jude's curiosity and she went to bed to dream of Claudia, walking alone outside the Taj Mahal.

As she was leaving for work the following day, Wilfred dashed out of the Porters' Lodge calling her name.

'Your honourable!'

Jude hadn't a clue who he was talking to her.

'Your Ladyship!' he bellowed.

She stopped.

'Me?'

'This is for you.' He handed her a letter.

'Thanks,' she said, and stuffed it in her pocket.

'It's from Radio Cambridgeshire look, it's written all over the back,' he added excitedly.

She grabbed the letter and pushed it into Wilfred's hands.

'Read it to me, please,' she gulped.

Nothing could have pleased him more. Masterfully he ripped open the envelope while Jude watched with a thumping heart.

'Yes?' she whispered.

He cleared his throat as if he were making a speech.

'"Dear Miss Summers", it says. Funny they should call you that and not use your proper title?'

'Go on.'

'"Thank you for your application which we read with interest. Will you be available for an interview on 29 August at 10.30? Please contact my secretary on extension 423. Yours sincerely, Ivan Ward".' He carefully folded up the letter and returned it to Jude. 'Well done, Miss Judith, though I do think you should put 'em straight about your title.'

Jude flung her arms around his neck and kissed him before running the length of King's Parade waving her hands in the air. Wilfred watched, po-faced.

'Always said she was two sandwiches short of a picnic.'

Jude was distracted all day, showing people to the wrong seats, losing her torch, even opening the exit doors in the middle of the performance. It was a relief to see Jonathan, even though they had parted badly the night before.

'I'm surprised to see you here,' she said. 'I thought you might never speak to me again.'

'Sorry, Jude. I seem always to behave like a bear with a sore ass in Cambridge.' He pecked her lightly on the cheek. 'What's up?' he asked. 'You're as white as a ghost.'

'I've got an interview at Radio Cambridgeshire.'

'Brilliant! Let me buy you a drink?'

During her afternoon break they nipped round to the Red Lion where Jonathan bought her a glass of wine.

'Cheers, Jude.'

She gulped back the wine and asked for another.

'Can you believe the interview's the day after tomorrow?'

'That's good. It gives you less time to get nervous.'

'But I *am* nervous.'

'I'll tell you what, take tomorrow off.'

'I can't, I'm working.'

'Be a devil,' he urged, and she was.

It was only when she woke up in the middle of the night that Jude realised, in the wild excitement of the day, she'd completely forgotten to phone David who was away for a few days at an OU Summer School.

I'll phone him tomorrow, she thought, as she rolled over in bed.

They cycled out of the city with their bicycle baskets loaded up, Jonathan had the picnic, Jude had her other.

'We're going across the fen to Ely,' he said, switching gears and shooting ahead of her. 'Put a spurt on!'

The fen was beautiful. Large and empty, baking in the continuing heat of a long, hot August. Startled by their laughter, larks burst out of ripening corn, and butterflies danced around them. The sky, an immense vault of arching blue, made the flat land seem small and insignificant, a strange experience for Jude who was well used to the massive bulk of Northern hills. They cycled through villages graced with lovely churches, and passed over land reclaimed from the

sea by eighteenth-century Dutch engineers. Jonathan knew so much about the area it was like a conducted tour through Wonderland.

'I never knew there was so much history round here,' Jude marvelled.

'It's the fen. You've got to dig ten feet down to find it.'

They stopped for a picnic lunch by the river, just outside Ely. Jude threw herself down on the bank and splashed water on to her arms and legs.

'That's better,' she sighed, and lay looking up at the sky pierced by the towering bulk of Ely cathedral.

'Come on, eat, this isn't a pleasure trip.'

Jonathan's lunch was delicious – small sticks of French bread, pâté, cheddar cheese and apples.

'I didn't bring any booze,' he said, handing her a carton of apple juice. 'You'll need all your faculties this afternoon.' He paused and added, 'I've set up an interview with the Bishop of Ely.'

Jude spilt half the carton of juice on to her skirt.

'You've what!'

'You heard.'

'I can't interview a Bishop.'

'Of course you can, he's no different from anybody else.'

'But what can I ask him?' she panicked. 'What can I talk to him about?'

'Jude, he's a Bishop and this is his diocese. It's not that hard.'

She grabbed her notebook and began scribbling. 'OK,' she said, talking to herself. 'It's summer in a small cathedral town. We've got tourists, lots of them?'

He nodded as she looked up.

'And the flower festival?'

'Bound to be a flower festival,' he agreed.

'And the Appeal Fund?'

'There's always an Appeal Fund.'

'Don't they have a service for animals in Ely cathedral?'

'Yes, every year.'

'Anything else?'

'Restoration work, fund-raising, the usual,' he added. 'Now can we go? We shouldn't keep His Lordship waiting.'

They found the Bishop in the sacristy, polishing a pair of candlesticks.

'I shouldn't really be doing this,' he confided, 'but Mrs Badcock always leaves them streaky round the bottom.' He shook hands with Jude and clapped Jonathan warmly on the back.

'How are you, dear boy?' he asked.

Jude briefly wondered how they knew each other but there was no time for casual chat while she was setting up the UHER.

'Rightio, Miss Summers,' said the Bishop, folding up his duster. 'Where would you like to start?'

She was just about to say the sacristy would do fine when he gently interrupted her.

'If I may make a suggestion? The clerestory has had extensive repair work recently – perhaps you'd like to start there? It's really very exciting.' Jude nodded and followed him up the narrow spiral staircase, half nervous and half enjoying herself. They arrived in the clerestory and what was left of Jude's breath after the long climb was snatched away by the magnificent view down the nave.

'Check the levels,' Jonathan whispered. 'They'll be difficult with this echo.'

The Bishop in his excitement was running here, there and everywhere, pointing out new masonry, cleverly inserted between the old stonework. Jude, encumbered by the UHER, was forced to take a slower pace and the Bishop finally fell in with her. She was surprised at the ease of the interview and even more surprised by the thrill of it all. Most of her prepared questions went out of the window as the Bishop's stories prompted others. As the interview drew to a close the tape whisked off the spool.

'Perfect timing,' beamed the Bishop.

'Allelujah!' sighed Jude. 'I'm glad that's over.'

'Come, come, it wasn't that bad, was it?' joked the Bishop. 'Jonathan, dear boy, let me show you the view.'

Taking him by the arm, he led Jonathan to the centre of the nave and pointed out the gargoyles, newly restored, glowering down at the gilded angels over the high altar. She smiled as the Bishop gently removed a spider's web from out of the mouth of a gaping gargoyle.

'How come you two are on such good terms?' she whispered to Jonathan as they wound their way back down the spiral staircase.

He smiled mischievously.

'He's my uncle.'

'*What*! You could have told me earlier.'

'It might have made you nervous and you were brilliant, Jude, a natural.'

They had tea in the Bishop's Palace then cycled back to Cambridge with the river on one side of them, loud with the cry of waterfowl, and the fen on the other. After the heat of the long day the sun went down like a red ball of fire leaving the land suddenly dark and empty.

'Spooky!' shivered Jude.

'This whole area's jumping with ghosts, you know.'

'Tell me later,' she said, glancing nervously over her shoulder.

'Haunted land,' he continued cheerfully.

'Belt up!'

She flew on ahead of him, eager to be back within the safe, neon-lit boundaries of the city. She was surprised when Jonathan headed across town and not straight back to King's as she'd expected.

'Where are we going?' she called out to him.

'To edit your interview,' he called back. She was stunned when he dismounted and locked up his bike outside Radio Cambridgeshire.

'Jonathan, I've got an interview here tomorrow,' she whispered.

'I know,' he answered easily. 'There's only Mike here.'

'Who's he?' she asked, worried that he'd be on her interview panel the following day.

'He's a friend and a freelancer.' Seeing her tense face, he added, 'Relax. His contract runs out at the end of the month and he's taken a job in Newcastle.'

He rang the bell to the news office and spoke to Mike through the intercom system.

'Hi, Mike. It's me, Jonathan Raphael.'

'Thank God for that,' mumbled the sleepy Mike. 'Anybody's better company than the night watchman and his fucking Alsatian.'

There was a buzz and the door swung open. Jonathan ran up the stairs two at a time, Jude following more cautiously. It was hot in the studio and Jonathan took off his jacket and threw it carelessly over a chair then switched on the editing machine. She was again aware of the physical change in him. Nothing like as tall as David, he was strongly built and very muscular. The Californian tan accentuated not only his dark good looks but also the lines of his body. Through the thin shirt he wore she could clearly see his long back and broad chest. His black jeans, faded to grey, clung to his hips and thighs. What mesmerised Jude was the restless energy that characterised everything he did. He was always thinking or doing or arguing, never still, never satisfied. As she watched him swiftly wind her tape on to the machine she understood, for the first time, why he'd chosen film directing as a career. It combined all his controlling, managerial skills with an unrestricted intellectual creativity that knew no formal bounds.

'Hey! Come on,' he ordered, as he caught her staring thoughtfully into space 'This is no time for dreaming. Watch!'

A year of producing the student radio programme with Claudia had made him deft and quick at what seemed to Jude the incomprehensible art of editing.

'The first rule in this game is never chop too much. You can edit bits later but if you slice up your tape you've lost your interview, OK?' Jude, perched nervously on a chair halfway across the room, nodded.

'Come a bit closer and put these on.' He handed her a set of headphones and rolled the tape. Jude listened.

'The sound quality's perfect,' she said.

'It has to be. The BBC transmit world-wide.'

Jude looked horrified.

'Not *everything*,' he added with a mischievous laugh. 'The nation isn't ready for you yet.'

She watched, intrigued by his quick, light movements.

'You and Claude must've made a great team,' she said.

He looked up, surprised by her comment.

'I mean, she's so good at interviewing and asking all the right questions and you're so skilful at all this technological stuff.'

'She's pretty hot on the old technology,' he said generously. 'And believe me, Jude, it all comes down to practice. If you've a programme due out live, in ten minutes, you edit like fuck!' She burst out laughing but Jonathan's thoughts were only for her interview. 'There's a hell of a long gap here,' he said, stopping the tape and turning it until he caught the out-breath. 'And a mumble here. Uncle Ben's the best mumbler . . .' He lightly threaded the tape back and forth until he could mark the exact spot for cutting with yellow editing chalk. 'Right, Jude, over to you what else needs chopping?'

She gulped. She'd been enjoying watching an expert at work and wasn't quite ready for the instant hands on experience. However, she clamped the earphones on her head and listened carefully, picking out the pauses and nervously marking them with chalk.

'Usually you cut on the out-breath and pick up on an in- breath,' he said. Listening in on his head set he moved the tape across the sound track. 'That's the best we'll get.' He picked up a small razor and sliced a piece of discarded tape

lying in the dustbin. 'Always test it's sharp before you begin. A blunt razor can bugger everything up.' He neatly cut out the unwanted sections and hung the strips of tape around his neck. 'Just in case I need to stick it all back together again,' he added with a wink.

'Here's the bit where the Bishop bent down to show us the new masonry.' Jude listened intently. 'It's very muffled.'

'I'll have to cut the lot,' he said, and confidently sliced through what looked like half the interview.

Jude stared anxiously at the growing strands of tape around his neck.

'Are you sure we won't need those?' she asked.

'Don't worry. It always looks more than it actually is.' He pulled more tape through. 'We'll pick up here, on your next question.'

Jude heard her voice, slowed down to a slur, asking a question about the cost of the renovation work.

'Yes, that's good,' she said, impressed by the cleverness of his editing. 'You can hardly tell it's been fiddled about with.'

'That's the idea.'

He started carefully to connect the cut sections with red editing tape.

'Not too much of this stuff or you lose the continuity.' He fast forwarded the edited tape and played back the interview. Jude listened open-mouthed.

'Well?' he said as it finished.

'Jonathan, it's so professional. It doesn't even sound like me!' Delighted she flung her arms around his neck and hugged him tight.

'Thank you! Thank you so much.'

Thrilled to see her so happy, Jonathan returned her hug and for a few seconds they stood wrapped in each other's arms. His soft, dark eyes lingered briefly on her upturned face.

'Thank *you*,' he said, slowly brushing a strand of hair from off her cheek. 'I've had a perfect day.'

Mike wandered in yawning.

'Finished?' he asked, nodding towards the editing machine.

'Yes, just,' Jonathan answered, quickly pulling away from Jude.

'See you then,' Mike said, and still yawning he led them downstairs and locked up for the night.

Outside King's Jonathan handed her the edited tape.

'Remember to hand it over at the interview,' he said. She nodded nervously. 'You've made me sound so good I feel a fraud.'

'Bullshit. It shows you're keen. They'll like that.' He paused briefly then said, 'Look, I've been trying, unsuccessfully, to think of different ways of saying this without causing alarm so I'm just going to tell you straight, right?' She nodded, wondering what was coming next.

'The interviewing panel know you're a brain-box, that's why you've been short-listed, but they might be wary of you as an intellectual. First-class degree and all that crap.' He stopped and smiled. 'A prejudice I sympathise with, you understand.'

'Jonathan, don't start.'

'OK, OK. But you've got to prove you can turn your hand to anything, from Shakespeare to brewing up, to live interviews and instant editing. That's the only way you'll get this job. Right?'

'I'll pretend I'm Claudia,' she said, half joking.

'Just be yourself.' He smiled softly. 'Good night.'

It was late when she got to bed but Jude was too restless to sleep. She ran a deep bath and soaked in the soapy water. Lying, half-dreaming, the day came back in a flood of images: the cool air in the clerestory, the jewel-dark beauty of the cathedral nave, the river fluting across the fen and ripe cornfields ablaze with poppies. Jonathan's hands, broad and smooth, deftly winding the tapes and his eyes gazing into hers as they hugged each other. Her bath water grew cool. Shivering, Jude dried herself and went to bed.

She fell asleep, as peaceful as a child, with a smile upon her face.

She felt surprisingly calm when she woke, happy that the big day had at last come She walked through the Botanical Gardens to the radio station with swallows skimming the hot air above her. It didn't seem like a day for work, more the beginning of an adventure. When she booked into reception three other candidates were waiting, all nervously sipping coffee as they tried to casually flip through the morning's papers. When the intercom buzzed the overbright receptionist beamed at Jude.

'Miss Summers, would you go up?'

At the top of the stairs Ivan Ward, the Station Manager, was waiting for her. He whisked her into the boardroom and introduced her to the afternoon presenter producer for whom the new researcher would be working. Jude shook hands with the Programme Organiser whose eyes rested on her breasts, then sat down and smiled at them all, astonished at how calm she felt.

'We see from your application form, Miss Summers, that you have a first class honours degree from Leeds.' The Station Manager nodded his approval as if to say he liked the company of intellectuals. 'However, though we do appreciate our literary inheritance, this is a radio station. Staff working here must be able to turn their hand to anything – editing, writing, presenting, interviewing, even brewing up.' He smiled at the idea of such a common little chore. 'We wonder what you might have to offer us apart from your academic prowess, Miss Summers?'

Jude could hardly believe her ears The interview was going exactly as Jonathan had predicted. Suddenly flooded with confidence she launched off into her first media speech. She was articulate, quick, bright and relentless. Out came the tapes, scripts and articles. All were discussed and dissected as if she wasn't even there.

'She's got a good ear for dialogue, the writing's strong.'

'Don't like the review stuff, bit arty for our listeners.'

'Nice interview in the Cathedral, lots of atmosphere, fine quality too.' Bill, the afternoon presenter, turned to Jude, impressed.

'Done a lot of interviewing, love?'

'Some,' she answered cautiously. 'I need more practice though.' Ian Smart, the Programme Organiser, smiled indulgently.

'You'll get it here, I promise you.'

Jude wondered fleetingly what exactly he had in mind.

'My editing's a bit weak, and of course I've never worked a radio desk single-handed.'

They all nodded sagely.

'Wouldn't expect a junior researcher to come in with that under her belt,' smarmed the Programme Organiser.

'Though I'd expect it in six months' time,' interrupted Bill, his voice clearly betraying contempt for Ian Smart.

The Station Manager eyed them both and smiled smoothly.

'You have an excellent voice for radio, Jude. Though, of course we do our own voice tests here – if we were to take you on board.'

She nodded politely and decided it was time to take the initiative.

'What sort of qualities are you looking for in your researcher?' she asked.

Ivan Ward smiled, impressed by her forthright manner. It was such a relief to get a live one.

'Over to you, Bill.'

Given his head, the afternoon presenter was off.

'I want a practical kid, somebody who doesn't need to be told everything twice. The last one couldn't remember the bloody post code.' He glared at the Programme Organiser as if he held Smart personally responsible. 'I want somebody who can interview, edit it back in ten

minutes then put it on my desk for a ten-minute slot in the afternoon show.'

Jude gulped. She was definitely *not* the person for the job.

'We'll help you whenever we can, but we're all pressed for time. Generally speaking you're on your own. Another thing: we go through guests like kids eat toffees. I don't just need ideas, it's contacts too.' He eyed her sharply. 'Who do you know in these parts, Jude?'

Controlling her rising panic she calmly answered, 'I have a lot of university contacts.'

Their downturned mouths spoke volumes. She immediately turned tack. 'And contacts in the town too.'

They waited expectantly.

'Cinema and theatre managers and staff, a couple of PRs on the Science Park who could quickly set up directors and managers for interviews.' It was a half lie she'd thought of in bed the night before and she knew it was useful. 'Porters, shopkeepers, market stall owners.' She paused for breath and realised she was running out of ideas.

'How would a guy on the market make a good contact?' Bill quizzed her.

'He might not,' she answered honestly. 'But they always have an idea of somebody who will. They're wheeler-dealers,' she invented on the spur of the moment. 'They might not have the goods but they always know somebody who has.'

The afternoon presenter smiled, clearly liking her grasp of reality.

'Well, at least you've done a bit of homework.'

'I've done a lot,' she assured him.

'Have you listened to our programmes?' butted in Smart.

'Yes, often,' she lied.

'What improvements would you like to see?'

'Your station seems to reach a very large area, from this side of Newmarket to Peterborough, is that right?'

The Station Manager nodded, pleased with her observation. 'It's vast. Difficult to satisfy everybody.'

'I'm sure,' she agreed. 'Cambridge seems to get most of the focus and I wonder how the areas outside the city feel?' There was a stunned pause so Jude answered her own question. 'Neglected, I should think.' The panel stiffened as a man. Bill quickly hid a smile, the Programme Organiser frowned and Ward looked hard and calculating. So the clever bit wasn't just a pretty face after all.

'Places like Wisbech, March and Newmarket,' she said, remembering Jonathan's geography lesson from the day before. 'Don't they ever feel like poor relations?'

'Newmarket's in Suffolk,' Smart informed her sharply. 'Not our county.'

'Then why do we do four outside broadcasts from Newmarket every year?' snapped Bill. 'I've never heard you complaining about county boundary lines when it comes to race meetings.'

'Please, gentlemen,' Ward quickly interrupted what threatened to be an open fight, 'I'm keen to hear Miss Summers's point of view.'

Jude finished her prepared speech without realising that she'd hit the bullseye. Since the radio station had opened the Station Manager had been inundated with letters of complaint from outraged licence-payers, outside Cambridge who felt they weren't getting their money's worth. Some of them had actually had the cheek to send copies of their letters to Broadcasting House, complaining that just because they lived in the far reaches of the Cambridgeshire fen their area never got a look in on local radio. Ward's personal opinion was, if they chose to live out in the arse-hole of the world, where bugger-all happened apart from a cow getting stuck in the dyke, that was their problem. However, he'd been instructed otherwise by the big boys in London. Their present broadcasting vision was to bring in 'the voice of the county'. His brief was to go local and the little brainbox in front of him

had unwittingly put her finger bang on the button. He was well impressed.

'So, Jude, you'd like to get involved in programmes across the county?' She caught Bill's gaze and waited to take her cue from him. After all, if she got the job he'd be running the show.

'There's no reason why the afternoon show couldn't go countywide,' Bill agreed.

It was exactly what Ward was waiting to hear

'Good, good,' he enthused. He glanced at the clock, shuffled the papers on his desk and rose to his feet. 'It's been a pleasure, Miss Summers.' He took Jude's hand and shook it firmly. 'I'm sure we'll be in touch.' She left the room feeling the Programme Organiser's eyes scorching up and down her body.

'We'll be in touch,' the secretary repeated Ward's optimistic parting shot.

'I hope so . . .' Jude muttered under her breath as she left the building. The interview was over and it was only eleven-thirty. She walked down the busy main road wondering what to do with herself. On a whim, she pushed open the gates of the Botanical Gardens and wandered along the leafy paths hedged with exotic flowers. Appropriately enough she relived the interview in the hot house, drenched with the perfume of arum lilies. Had she been overprepared, had she concentrated too much on Ward and not Bill? She trotted her way around the Tropical House then headed back into Cambridge.

Later that afternoon, in the half-empty cinema, Jude fell asleep on the back row. She awoke with a start to find Mr Blott, the manager, shaking her by the shoulder.

'Jude! Jude!' he hissed crossly. 'Telephone call. Sounds bloody urgent too.' She sprang to her feet, confused and frightened.

'Who?'

'How the hell should I know?'

Stumbling up the darkened aisles, she dashed into the office and grabbed his phone.

'Hello, Judith Summers here.'

The clipped voice of the BBC receptionist answered.

'One moment, Miss Summers, I'm putting you through.' Suddenly she was speaking to Ward.

'Jude, sorry to trouble you at work but we keep a tight ship here.'

Even in her high state of nerves she wondered why he referred to the radio station as if it were the *Queen Mary* ready to set sail.

'We reached our decision this afternoon and . . .'

Jude held her breath.

'Yes?'

'You are undoubtedly our first choice,' boomed Ward. 'Would you be able to take up the post at the end of September?'

Jude held on to the phone with one hand and squeezed Mr Blott's arm with the other.

'Definitely!'

'Jolly good,' answered Ward who'd never known disappointment in his life. 'We'll put a formal letter in the post with the usual personnel forms. The rest we can sort out when you start.'

Jude kept nodding.

'Say something!' hissed Mr Blott.

'Fine, fine. Thank you very much.'

'Excellent,' boomed Ward. 'Well done. Welcome aboard!'

Jude quickly hung up then burst into tears.

'I've got the job!'

'Good,' answered Blott briskly. 'Now move it, the bleeders are swarming in for the next show.'

Jude went on to autopilot until Jonathan showed up with a huge bottle of Taittinger and a dozen red roses.

'Congratulations! You're a genius,' he said, throwing the roses into her arms.

'Jonathan! How did you know?'

'A little bird,' he said, nodding in the direction of Blott's office.

'Isn't it wonderful?'

'Brilliant! Bloody brilliant!' he laughed. 'Come on, let's celebrate.' Grabbing her hand, he made for the door.

'Jonathan, I can't. I'm working.'

'Oh, no, you're not,' he said, unbuttoning her overall. 'I've fixed it with the boss-man.'

Jude let the overall slither to her feet and kicked it into the air.

'What're we waiting for?' she cried, and holding the flowers high in triumph she ran out of the cinema.

They bought an Indian take-away and took it back to Jonathan's room which was now almost empty, apart from a few pictures on his walls. His books were crated up and his trunk packed ready for his departure early the next morning. Standing by his window, Jonathan opened the champagne and the cork whizzed across the river, disturbing some sleeping ducks on the other side. Pouring the wine into the only two containers left in his room, a half pint glass and a sherry glass, he clinked his glass against hers.

'To you, Jude. Success!'

'Sweet success,' she said, savouring the words.

'There's nothing sweeter.'

'You won't come back here for a long time, will you?' she asked.

'Not unless I have to.'

'So it's goodbye?'

'Only to Cambridge, Jude, not to you.'

Suddenly David's voice calling from the landing outside broke the stillness of the night.

'Jude!'

Jonathan's face darkened with anger

'Jude!' David repeated impatiently.

'Here,' she answered uncertainly. 'In Jonathan's room.'

For several seconds Jonathan stared at her, his eyes burning into hers.

'He's back,' she said awkwardly.

'I heard.'

As David's footsteps approached his door Jonathan's eyes bored into her and Jude blushed as her heart began to race.

'Jonathan . . .?' she said, reaching out for his hand.

The door flew open and David burst in.

'Did you get it?' he demanded, standing in the doorway, holding a bottle of Chianti and a bunch of carnations.

Still staring at Jonathan, she nodded. 'Yes,' she answered as David's arms claimed her and Jonathan silently left the room.

Chapter Five

As the Boeing circled the lagoon Jude's heart flew into her mouth.

'Oh, David, look!'

On the inside seat, he peered over her shoulder to share her view. Jude's eyes were all over the place, trying to take in everything all at once.

'I never realised there were so many islands.'

'It's amazing to think it all began with an army chasing the poor buggers into the sea.'

'Who?'

'Lombards from the North. They swiped the land then drove the Veneti on to those islands out there in the lagoon.' Jude gazed down into the wide expanse of open sea.

'How on earth did they survive?'

'God knows, but they lived to build an empire.'

The small islands, like a scatter of pebbles, disappeared and Venice appeared, abristle with bell-towers and terracotta roofs. The plane dropped height and the blue Adriatic gave way to the flat brown fields surrounding Mestre on the mainland.

'*Buon giorno, stiamo per atterrare a Venezia*,' crackled the Italian pilot's voice over the microphone. There was a slight pause then the announcement came in English.

'Welcome to Venice. The air temperature is 30 degrees with a warm sea breeze.'

The Italians around Jude smiled indulgently as if they personally had laid on the weather.

'Italy is one hour ahead of British Summer Time so please

check your watches. We should be landing in about five minutes, please remain seated until the landing lights come on. We hope you had a good journey with Alitalia and look forward to flying with you again.'

Jude smiled at the clipped formality of his carefully rehearsed English speech.

'Quick, look!' said David as the plane circled the lagoon for the final time. 'That's St Mark's.'

The plane cruised low and for a few seconds Jude could see the shining dome of the Basilica and the elegant dimensions of the square, dense with people the size of coloured pinheads. The plane curved, bounced gently on the runway and landed. The Italian students a couple of rows behind them sent up a cheer at the touch of terra firma.

'Bravo! Bravo!' they called to the captain.

'Is this normal?' laughed Jude as the applause continued.

'Only in Italy. They're glad to be home.'

'I can see that,' she said as the students sprang to their seats and made a rush for the door.

'*Attenzione, attenzione*,' warned the hostess as she pushed open the door and let the executive class off first. The passengers flooded on to the tarmac, hazy in the heat, and made their way towards the airport buildings. Even in September the sun was intense and within minutes Jude's English summer clothes felt thick and lumpy against her body. They staggered into the cool of the marbled lounge and waited for their battered rucksacks to tumble off the shaky old turntable.

'Now for customs,' said David.

Customs was nothing more than a table near the exit sign against which a customs officer leant smoking his cigarette. In no hurry he stubbed out his cigarette and nodded them through, his boredom suddenly lifted by the sight of Jude's flaming hair.

'Welcome, Signorina,' he said, totally ignoring David at her side.

'*Grazie*, Signore,' she replied, pleased to show off her basic Italian.

They left the airport buildings and walked out into the dazzling sunshine.

'Marco Polo Airport,' sighed Jude, reading the big sign over the entrance. 'At last we're on holiday.' Excited as a child, she flung her arms around David's neck and hugged him tight.

'Not quite, Jude. We've got to get over there yet.'

He nodded towards Venice, wrapped about by a shimmering sapphire lagoon.

'Let's go,' she said, heading for the jetty where boats bobbed on the water like fat ducks

'Hold it,' cried David, yanking her back. 'They're hotel launches and taxis, they cost a *milliom*!' He pushed her on to a bus which pulled out almost immediately, heading away from the sea.

'Hey, what's all this?' Jude asked, staring at the farms and flat fertile fields on both sides of the road.

'We have to skirt the town of Mestre to get to the causeway that links Venice to the mainland,' David explained 'Sorry, love, but you get the worst first on this trip. One day we'll be rich enough to take a launch across the lagoon and land in style, in Piazza San Marco. Until then it's the back of the bus for us, babe.'

Jude wriggled her nose against David's and kissed him gently on the mouth.

'Ah, but when we're rich and famous,' she whispered, 'will we be happy and in love?'

'You bet,' he said, squeezing her tight.

Five minutes later they rounded a corner and headed towards an ugly industrial sprawl riddled with oil refineries.

'Marghera, the dark side of Venice Its oil refineries are all along the coast, nearly down to Chioggia. What with the industrial waste from the factories and the air pollution Venice doesn't stand a chance. The city's built on wood piles, over a thousand years old, and this lot,' he nodded

at the refineries turning the sky grey overhead, 'is damaging the foundations more than the passing of the centuries.'

'So why don't they stop right now?'

'If only they would. A friend of mine at the university works for a conservation group called Peril San Marco – he says they've moved things along a bit, forced people to see the dangers, but it's all too late.' He stopped as he saw the light fade from Jude's happy face. 'Enjoy it, love,' he said, kissing her eyes, big and silvery bright with the reflected blue from the sea.

Jude leaned against the window and stared down the causeway at the city sparkling on the waters edge.

'Be quick,' she murmured, desperate to be at her journey's end.

They stopped in a traffic jam of buses, taxis, lorries, transporters, cars and motor bikes. Traffic fumes clogged the air which was loud with the racket of car horns blaring at each other.

'Piazzale Roma, Piazzale Roma,' bawled the driver. '*Fine corsa*!' He flung open the bus doors and herded his passengers off. '*Fine corsa*!'

David grabbed their cases and pushed his way through the surging crowd of tourists.

'Follow me,' he shouted as he headed towards a jumble of knick-knack stalls.

Jude looked around, confused and disappointed.

'Where's the water?'

'It's coming.'

He disappeared down a flight of stone steps and Jude followed, her bags banging against her calves, her eyes dazzled by the unfamiliar brilliance of the sun. She stumbled down the last few steps but a boy selling Venetian glass saved her fall.

'*Attenzione, Signorina.*'

'*Grazie*,' she gasped and leaned against a wall to steady herself. Suddenly there it was the Grand Canal.

'David!'

Grabbing his arm she pulled him close to her and together they leaned over the wall and stared. The clamour of the piazza faded away and for the very first time Jude heard the sounds of Venice: the lapping water, the call of the *gondolieri*, the chug of barges criss-crossing mid stream, and underneath it all the chattering rhythm of the city. Slowly a boat headed towards them.

'Here comes the *vaporetto*. The number one,' said David.

'It's the best bus I've ever seen,' said Jude as the *vaporetto*, loaded with tourists shouting and pointing in all directions, churned the water to a foam.

'That's the bus stop,' said David, pointing at what seemed little more than a raft bobbing about on the edge of the canal. Jude stepped on to it and felt slightly queasy. Trying to balance herself and her luggage, she jostled her way forward through the crowd.

'Don't be too polite,' David said, thrusting himself before her. 'Everybody pushes in.'

'Eh, *scusi*!' called the conductor as he threw a rope around the capstan and pulled the boat in. The bus stop raft bounced on the water and Jude steadied herself on David's arm.

'Piazza San Marco! Piazza San Marco!' yelled the conductor as he helped the passengers on. David shoved their luggage on to the racks and joined Jude in the prow of the boat. They moved out into the middle of the canal and with a rush of water the *vaporetto* ploughed on its way.

'*Attenzione*!' yelled the conductor, pointing at Jude's arm hanging over the rail.

'Watch out, he's pulling in,' said David.

'Pulling in?' she cried. 'We've only just pulled out!' There was another rush as half the passengers made a move for the exit.

'Where are we now?' she asked.

'The Ferrovia,' he answered, nodding towards the railway station.

Jude stepped back as an unbelievable number of people elbowed their way on to the *vaporetto*.

'We could sink!'

'*Attenzione*!' called the conductor in the same monotone as before.

The water frothed and gurgled as the *vaporetto* swooped around a wide curve and the full majesty of the Grand Canal opened up before them. Sunshine gilded the palaces framing the waterway.

'Fondaco dei Turchi, San Marcuola, San Stae, Ca' Pesaro, the Ca' d'Oro,' David murmured the names as they passed downstream and Jude's breath caught in her throat. It was a litany that would live in her mind for the rest of her life.

'Wake me up if I'm dreaming.'

'No, you're not dreaming. Ca' d'Oro – the House of Gold – was encrusted in gold and gems in the fifteenth century. It must have been glorious.'

'It still is,' she sighed.

The palace seemed to float on the water, a delicate vision of filigreed stone and elaborate archways that caught the sun and dazzled the eye.

'Hold your nose, here comes La Pescheria, the fish market.' A pretty, arcaded building swung into sight, packed with shoppers and market traders. The smell of fish, fresh and rotten, drifted across the canal and hit them midstream. Jude watched, fascinated by the fishermen unloading crates of shark, octopus, squid and lobster.

'Just wait till you taste it,' said David. 'The Venetians do things with fish you've never even dreamed of.'

'It doesn't sound decent,' she laughed.

'After a supper of clams, squid and oysters you won't want to be decent!'

The next bend brought the Rialto bridge into view.

'Rialto . . . *Rialto*!' bellowed the conductor anxiously eyeing the crowd waiting to board the *vaporetto*. No sooner was

the rope over the capstan than they were surging forward. '*Aspetate . . . Aspetate*!' the conductor yelled as he helped Jude with her luggage. She quickly stepped sideways as the impatient crowd, led by two fat nuns, charged the *vaporetto*. Completely ignoring the conductor's angry '*Attenzione*! *Attenzione*!' they zipped all over the boat like an invasion of ants.

'*Stronzi*!' muttered the inspector.

'What's he say?' asked Jude.

'Turds!' laughed David.

Clinging to the cool of the arcaded buildings, they walked to their pensione. All around was the ceaseless push and pull of people and boats, incessant babble. The smack of water on the sea breeze was like music to Jude's ears. Above her workmen clattered and drilled, repairing a crumbling palace, and below her green water sucked at the marble steps of a colonnaded entrance.

'How far now?' she asked, easing her rucksack.

'Quite a way. The pensione's just opposite the Opera House. Follow the signs to the Fenice.'

Jude staggered on, grateful for the cool, narrow streets off the Rialto. The smell of coffee and cakes, salami and garlic, nearly drove her mad.

'Let's eat?' she begged.

'No, later,' he promised. 'Come on, just across the *campo* and we're there.'

When they turned into a tiny *calle* smelling of tom cats and urine Jude wondered if they were lost. Their bags scraped against the walls and their footsteps echoed loudly in the gloom but they came out into a burst of sunshine, right in front of their hotel.

'Hotel Fenice,' said David as he pushed open the door.

'*Chi è?*' called a woman from the cool of the dark interior.

'*Sono* David.'

'Ah, David! *Bene . . . bene*.' And the door clicked open. '*Avanti*!'

They walked into the cool of a marbled hall and the open arms of Signora Zorzi.

'*Caro, caro*!' she cried as she embraced David. '*Come sta*?'

David smiled and hugged her.

'*Molto bene, Signora, e lei*?'

'*Eh, così così*!' she answered with an eloquent hand gesture then turned to smile at Jude.

'*Piacere*,' she said, shaking her hand. Jude beamed at the friendly signora as David introduced them.

'*Mia fidanzata*, Jude Summers.'

Fidanzata? This was a new one to Jude. Were they married, good friends, relations or what? Smiling blankly, not sure what role she was expected to play, Jude waited for her cue.

'Fiancée,' David hissed sideways through his smile. Jude nodded and smothered a giggle. Would Wilfred at King's be impressed by her new title?

'Joode Somers.' The Signora mouthed the words and suddenly Jude's name took on a whole new meaning. '*Benvenuta a Venezia*.'

'*Grazie, Signora*,' replied Jude. '*Mi piace essere qui*.'

'*Eh, senti*!' laughed Signora Zorzi. '*La ragazza parla bene Italiano*.'

Jude laughed at this exaggeration of her very basic Italian.

'*Parlo un po'*,' she said, holding up her finger and thumb a centimetre apart.

'A little bit is good!' said the Signora and led them up the carpeted stairs to the first floor of the hotel. 'Jude, this is for you,' she said, flinging open the door of a neat, little room with a single bed. 'And David, you have your old room at the end of the corridor.'

He nodded. '*Perfetto*. Thank you for keeping it for me.'

'It is always yours, *caro*,' smiled the Signora as she reached up to ruffle his blond hair. "E 'as been coming to me since 'e was eighteen, so young and so thin!' she exclaimed.

David laughed. 'I wasn't thin by the time I left you!'

'Of course not,' she said with a shrug of her plump shoulders. 'It is a disgrace to be so thin.' She smiled fondly at Jude. 'Madonna! 'E always works so 'ard but – ah!' She held out her hands in a romantic gesture. 'Maybe 'e will not work so 'ard with you, Jude?'

The telephone rang in the foyer below.

'Rest now,' she said. '*Arrivederci*!'

'The minute she'd disappeared Jude flew down the corridor to David's room.

'What's going on?'

He stared at her, puzzled.

'The sleeping arrangements,' she said, nodding towards his crisply clean double bed.

'Shhh!' he whispered, pressing a finger to his lips and closing the door.

Jude's voice dropped to a whisper but the words still exploded out of her.

'Why can't I sleep with you?'

David smiled at her red, cross face.

'I always come here and it's cheap. The Signora always gives me a *sconto*.'

'What's that, an oral contraceptive?'

'A discount.'

'Discount! Well, I'm glad there's something in it for you.' David kissed her soft, sulky mouth and smiled into her mutinous eyes.

'She's a very strict Catholic.'

'Tough! Why should she spoil everybody's fun?'

'Jude, what else can she do?'

'Give us a bigger *sconto*!' she snarled. 'David!' she said as he began gently kissing her bare shoulder and feeling for her breasts. 'We're not married – it's a sin!'

'Only for Signora Zorzi,' he whispered, pulling her down onto his bed. 'It's all right for us.'

'David, we didn't come to Venice to placate your favourite landlady.'

'Shhh . . .' he mumbled, gently pushing open her thighs and stroking their silky softness. 'If we're quiet she won't hear a thing.'

'So you've done this before?'

He burst out laughing. 'A different woman every night.'

Jude climbed on top of him and pushed her tongue into his mouth. David groaned and pulled at her panties.

'Oh, David,' she moaned.

Suddenly there was an almighty crash from the corridor.

'*Jesus*!' he yelped, and sprang to the half-open door.

'David,' came the Signora's voice. '*Mi dia i passaporti*.'

'Christ, she wants our passports.'

'Then give them to her,' hissed Jude as she scurried into the bathroom. 'She might as well keep you under lock and key for all the fun we'll have.'

Half an hour later when David was taking a shower Jude flung open the shutters of her window and gazed down into the *rio* that ran behind the hotel. The waterway was no more than twelve feet across, dark and rather smelly, banked up on both sides by crumbling buildings that had seen happier, more glorious years. The warmth of the day still lingered in the stones and Jude hung over the sill mesmerised by the dappled light on the water. Through the open windows opposite came the sounds of families preparing their evening meal, the hum of kitchen machinery and of pots and pans clattering incongruously against the soft slip and slide of the water. From the network of narrow streets all around came the call of children playing, and enclosing the cacophony of domesticity was the distant throb of boats on the Grand Canal.

To her astonishment a gondola suddenly slid round the narrow turn in the *rio* just under her window. Three others followed, loaded down with German tourists with snapping Leicas. As the *gondoliere* cruised past the swarthy singer in the back of the boat burst into song, accompanying his poignant delivery with a jingling concertina. Melodious voices

filled the evening sky with 'O Sole Mio' and 'Arrivederci, Roma'. Jude clapped from her window and the *gondoliere* blew her a kiss.

'*Ciao, bella*,' he called and disappeared around the next curve, leaving only echoes of his song behind. A knock on her door made Jude jump and grab a towel.

'*Chi è?*' she called.

'It's not Al Pacino.'

'Pity, I bet he's not a good Catholic,' Jude teased as she opened her door.

'Neither am I,' David answered, yanking off her towel. 'Come on, get dressed or we'll miss the *passeggiata*.'

'Passa-what?'

'The evening stroll, a *must* for any self-respecting Italian.' Jude pulled on her new dress, bought that morning, an hour before they left Cambridge.

'Will this do?'

'Beautifully,' he said, caressing the green and coral strapless dress.

'You'll make a very *bella figura*, Signorina.'

In the hallway they passed the Signora who proudly introduced Jude to her husband, Arturo. Jude smiled and shook hands with him but she found his accent impenetrable. Signora Zorzi proudly showed her a photograph of a handsome *gondoliere*.

'My 'usband.' she said.

'Mr Zorzi's been a *gondoliere* since he left school,' explained David. 'This is a picture of him in his prime.'

Jude smiled, genuinely impressed. Arturo beamed.

'I take you in my gondola.'

'*Sì, sì*,' she enthused. 'I'd like that very much.'

The Zorzis waved them off, smiling sentimentally at the two young lovers stepping out into the dusky warmth of a perfect evening. The narrow *calle* opened out into a busy square which shoppers criss-crossed to the Accademia and the Fenice. Children, unused to the hazards of city traffic

zipped around on skateboards and toddlers clambered up a huge bronze statue of Daniele Manin.

'Campo Manin,' said David.

Jude dodged sideways to avoid a fat boy thundering towards her on roller skates.

'*Attenzione*, Gianni!' called his mother.

'Let's move before we're flattened!' cried Jude, making a run through the barging children. Laughing and breathless they came to the quiet of Campo San Luca and made their way through a maze of dark alleyways to a delicate marble bridge.

'Close your eyes,' said David, pulling her under an arcaded passageway.

'I'll trip over,' she giggled, but kept her eyes tightly shut as David gently steered her forwards. Even with her eyes closed she could feel the light changing.

'Open.'

Jude's eyes flashed open and her jaw dropped.

'David!' she breathed, holding on to his arm to steady her shaking legs. 'It's glorious.'

'Piazza San Marco,' he announced, and led her into the beautiful square. Jude stared at St Mark's Basilica, at its golden domes and carved statues of the saints and the four bronze horses proudly guarding its front portals.

'It's – ' She started to speak but the bells rang out, snatching the words from her mouth and sending them flying with the pigeons. As the bells clamoured out the birds swooped and circled the square, slowly returning to their endless pecking and strutting when the ringing subsided.

'David, I can't believe it.'

'Neither can I, and I must have walked across this square a hundred times.'

She reached up to kiss his smiling mouth.

'Thank you.'

'Don't thank me, thank God! Come on, let's blow a week's wages on an *aperitivo*.'

They checked out each of the expensive cafes, trying to decide where to spend their hard-earned money. As the light began to fade Café Florian basked in the final rays of the setting sun.

'That's it,' said Jude as a three-piece band outside Florian's struck up the opening chords for the Charles Aznavour song 'La Mer'. They chose a table at the very front and ordered a glass of Orvieto Classico and a Campari.

'David, I could get used to this,' sighed Jude, revelling in the giddy luxury of her opulent surroundings. He smiled at her beautiful face, glowing with happiness, and raised his glass to hers.

'To success.'

'Success,' she echoed, vividly recalling that this was the word Jonathan had chosen. 'Sweet success,' she added, for the memory, and chinked her glass against his.

They sat outside Florian's for as long as was decently possible without buying another round. As night fell it brought an unexpected warmth and the caressing sound of the lapping waters of the lagoon. Spotlights came on all over the square and the flow of people increased rather than decreased.

'I've never seen so many gorgeous clothes in my life,' Jude gasped. 'Even the kids look great.'

'It's the hour of the *passeggiata*,' David explained. 'It's important for young Venetians to dress up and look their best. They have a big preoccupation with looking good. *Fare bella figura*, they call it. They check out each other's clothes, have an *aperitivo* and a chat, then go home happy.'

Jude stared at the designer outfits drifting by their table.

'I feel like I've got a walk-on part in a movie.'

'You look stunning too,' he reminded her, but Jude as always was unaware of the impact she was making. Sitting there with her dark gold hair fanned out around her glowing face, her eyes wide and lustrous, she outshone most of the women around her, loaded as they were with gold and diamonds.

'*Andiamo, bella donna*,' he said, taking her by the arm. They wandered across the *campo*, dodging pigeons and babies, and headed out towards the lapping waters of the lagoon. Gondolas dipped by, curling gracefully in and out of the big boats going back and forth between the Lido and the Veneto.

'That's San Giorgio,' said David, pointing to an island across the water. 'Right out there is the Lido and that island opposite is the Giudecca.'

They passed the Doges' Palace and crossed over the Bridge of Sighs then walked on along the Riva degli Schiavoni.

'Wish,' said David, turning her round to face the waterfront. Jude didn't even stop to think.

'I've only one wish – I want to live here.'

He waved an imaginary wand. 'Your wish will come true,' he laughed. 'You can live here with me, forever.'

'Hold on, you weren't part of the wish.'

'I'm the fairy and that's the deal!'

She wound her arms around his neck and pressed herself against him. Uncharacteristically he didn't respond. He was staring across the waterfront at the boat that had just pulled in.

'I'm sure that's Beata over there,' he murmured. Jude followed his gaze and saw dozens of people stepping off the boat on to the Riva degli Schiavoni.

'Bloody hell, it is her! Be quick, Jude, or we'll miss her.'

Holding hands, they ran along the waterfront and caught up with a dark, slim girl dressed in a cream linen suit.

David had told Jude all about Beata. He'd met her when he was an eighteen-year-old undergrad, visiting Venice for the first time. She was Venetian, though in fact she'd been educated at New College, Oxford. His passion for Byron had led him to the archive collection in the library of the Università di Venezia. It was there he'd bumped into Beata who'd shown him around the city and the university. They'd kept in touch over the years but it was only when David

decided to do his doctorate on Byron and the English Romantics in Venice that he really got to know Beata Lorenzetti. For two terms of his first year research he lived in Venice and was attached, as a post-grad student, to Venice University where Beata now taught. Though David was a few years her junior they became firm friends during that period, a time that cemented their relationship into a professional interdependence. When Jude had asked the inevitable question, 'Did you have a fling with her?' David had looked quite shocked and immediately answered, 'No way, absolutely *not*!' Which naturally led Jude to believe that Beata, though dazzlingly intelligent, was in fact a stout, intense woman, with pebble thick glasses and frizzy dark hair. The rear view of the tall, slim girl in the cream linen suit they were presently chasing certainly didn't fit that frumpy picture.

'Beata!' David called.

The girl stopped and looked around. Jude was momentarily obscured from her view but her face lit up when she saw David.

'*Caro*!' she cried and warmly kissed him on both cheeks. Jude battled her way through the crowd and almost fell on Beata.

'I'm so sorry,' she gasped as David steadied her.

'Jude, meet Beata Lorenzetti.'

The two women smiled, both instantly struck by the other. Beata had the classical look of the Mediterranean. Large, dark almond eyes, immaculately plucked eyebrows over beautifully curved lids, a long but elegant nose and soft, pouting mouth. Her glossy hair was cut in a lively bob that set off her high cheekbones and strong jawline.

'*Piacere*,' smiled Beata, kissing Jude lightly on both cheeks. There was no time for pleasantries, the crowd was on the point of jostling them off their feet.

'Come on,' said Beata. 'They're queueing up for the Vivaldi Concert in the Pietà, it'll be quieter further up the Riva'

With quick, graceful movements she led them to a little bar overlooking San Giorgio.

'Is this OK?'

'*Perfetto*!' laughed David.

'What would you like to drink, Jude?' asked Beata in her perfect English.

She stared at all the unfamiliar bottles lining the bar shelves and smiled.

'Wine.'

'You shall have the very best wine in the Veneto.' Turning to the waiter Beata said, '*Una bottiglia di Merlot.*'

'*Prego*,' he answered, neatly setting out an ashtray and roasted nuts.

Beata sat back and lit up a cigarette. She had a stylish originality that was distinctly European. The stiffness of her classic linen suit was offset by chunky gold jewellery and a swirling silk scarf, her impeccably cut hair was softly casual and the light touches of make-up on her eyes and lips were perfectly balanced by a golden tan. Jude's heart sank. Why did David know only beautiful women? First the Honourable Claudia Langham, now Signorina Lorenzetti. Self-conscious about her own big mouth and mass of hair, Jude fiddled with her glass. Catching her thoughtful expression, David quickly put his arm around her shoulder.

'Beata's dad has a vineyard in the Euganean Hills. He's the world's expert on booze.'

Beata smiled indulgently.

'I took David to visit my father's cellars last year. He sampled everything then collapsed in the barn with the chickens. My father thought he was wonderful.'

'I thought he was God almighty, plying me with all that free booze.'

'Do you like your wine?' Beata asked.

Jude sipped the rich, fruity Merlot and nodded.

'It's delicious.'

'That's good,' smiled David. 'Her dad made it.'

Jude raised her glass. '*Salute*, Signor Lorenzetti, and you too, Beata,' she added. 'I read your book, *Byron in Venice*, just before we left England. It's very good.'

Beata smiled charmingly.

'I was lucky. Originally it was my thesis at Oxford. A friend of mine in publishing suggested I rewrote it in an upbeat style and he published it. Luck,' she said with an eloquent shrug of her shapely shoulders. 'It seems to sell quite well,' she finished modestly.

'She's into the megabucks,' David teased as he poured out more wine. 'Her upbeat style included vivid descriptions of how many women Byron had in Venice!'

Beata laughed easily with him.

'It was while I was re-working the piece that I met David, in the *biblioteca*, here in Venice.'

'Honestly, I don't know what I would have done without your help,' he said with a warm smile.

'Jude, you should have seen him as an undergraduate.'

'She was deeply into being a serious Oxford post-grad, very snooty and remote,' David ribbed.

Beata ignored his teasing and went on with her own reminiscences.

'We all thought he was so sweet, so shy, so English.'

'She means a total prat,' David chipped in. 'How you Eyeties love to sentimentalise! I was useless. I couldn't speak a word of Italian, I got lost every time I went out, and if it hadn't been for *La Professoressa* here, I'd probably have drowned in the Grand Canal.' He took a sip of wine and struck a mock literary pose. '"The Significance of Byron's Writing in Venice" . . . sounds good, doesn't it?'

'*Molto impressivo*,' smiled Beata.

'Unfortunately I didn't know my arse from my elbow at the time,' he added, self-deprecatingly.

'But you do now, *caro*.'

Beata hailed the waiter and chatted to him briefly.

'I've ordered you some antipasti,' she said. '*Va bene?*'

'It must be wonderful being bilingual,' said Jude.

'When my family lived in England I think I was bilingual. At Oxford my English outweighed my Italian. Sadly it's now the other way round. I dream only in Italian, which is a great pity. I so enjoyed my bilingual dreams.'

'How long were your family in England?' Jude asked, intrigued.

'We lived in London for seven years. My father was attached to the Italian Embassy.'

'The Ambassador, actually,' David added.

'Wasn't England a shock after all this?' asked Jude, nodding towards the twinkling lights along the Schiavoni.

'Yes, but I liked it and the people too, though I always hated the weather. By the time I went to Oxford I'd become a complete Anglophile. Do you know, sometimes I even miss the rain.'

'Couldn't you go back?' Jude asked.

'Yes, but I love my work here in Venice.'

'Have you made up your mind about the Harvard lectureship?' David asked.

'I turned it down. I could never complete my work here in time to start there next spring.' Beata quickly checked her watch. 'Please excuse me, I have to go. I'm meeting Gabriele.' She rose and paid the waiter.

'How is Gabriele?' asked David.

'*Così, così*,' laughed Beata. 'You know Gabriele.' She turned to Jude with a warm smile. 'Would you like to have dinner with me on Wednesday?'

'That'd be lovely, thank you very much.'

Beata quickly kissed them both.

'*Buona notte*, have a lovely evening.'

With a wave she disappeared into one of the dark *calli* off the Riva degli Schiavoni.

'She reminds me of Claudia,' said Jude.

'She isn't at all like Claudia,' said David, rather too quickly.

'I didn't mean physically, I meant her style.'

'She's a lot kinder than Claude,' he added emphatically, 'and neither of them is as beautiful as you.'

Jude leant across the table to kiss him.

'Seriously, when did you really fall in love with me?'

'Seriously? On Haworth Moor,' he whispered.

'You couldn't even see me!' she teased.

'Ah, but I could see your shape, flickering, spectre like through the mist of my imagination.'

'Oh, yeah?'

'Hand on heart, I couldn't sleep a wink that night. Your face was everywhere and I was so happy, so ridiculously happy,' he said tenderly.

She stared out across the lagoon to San Giorgio.

'We're a long way from Haworth now,' she sighed dreamily.

'And very near the best fish restaurant in Venice!'

La Colomba was packed out.

'Oh no, we're too late,' groaned Jude, eyeing the wonderful food displayed in the window.

'They'll fit us in somewhere. *Una tavola tranquilla?*' David asked the waiter.

'*Si, Signore. Prego.*' He led them out to the terrace, to a table in a corner draped with bougainvillaea. '*Va bene, Signore?*'

'*Benissimo, grazie.*'

'*Desidera?*' said the waiter, pulling out his notebook and waiting for their order.

'*Due spaghetti alle vongole e due filetti San Pietro, con insalate miste.*'

'*Vino?*'

'*Si, Pinot Grigio.*'

The waiter bustled off and they sat and watched the moon rise.

'I don't think I've ever been as happy in my life,' sighed Jude.

'It's this city. Even on the verge of destruction it's still magical.'

The waiter reappeared with bottles and glasses, quickly followed by platefuls of steaming spaghetti.

'*Pronti*!' he said, setting down the food.

Jude sniffed the pungent sauce. 'Mmmm, what's this?'

'Fresh clams.'

She took a mouthful. 'David, they're gorgeous!'

'Try the wine, that's gorgeous too.'

'How many different kinds of wine have I tasted tonight?'

'Only three. There're hundreds more.'

They ate their food in reverential silence.

'You never mentioned how stunningly elegant Beata is,' Jude said, only half joking.

David paused, his fork halfway to his mouth.

'I suppose she is.'

Though it was hard to believe, Jude could see that he was serious.

'Do you *always* take beautiful women for granted?'

'Never you, my love.'

'Claudia?' she asked.

'You're completely wrong there. Claudia may be easy on the eye but she's hard on the ear. Beata's different. She's intense, she's intelligent, but she's also amazingly practical. Whenever we meet, whenever we talk, it's bang – straight into my work, and she's always got something new for me to read on Byron and the Romantics.' He stopped and sipped his wine. 'She's a mine of information, Jude, from both perspectives: Venice and England. Her book only glosses over her knowledge. I'm sort of exploiting her by coming here to finish the footnotes on my thesis,' he confessed.

'You checked it with her first, didn't you?' Jude enquired, suddenly worried.

'Sure and she was delighted, don't ask me why.'

'She's very fond of you.'

'Come on, Jude, asking her to share my footnotes is pushing

it a bit,' he said with a wink. 'Gathering together all the sources and the references is a pain in the arse. Sometimes it feels like a PhD in itself. It'll be a breeze doing the Italian references though. Beata will be through the old *biblioteca* like a dose of salts.'

'You'd better buy her something nice at the end of it. Working in a hot library in Venice, even on your beloved Byron,' she added cheekily, 'can't be much fun.'

'But she's got me and the English Romantics!'

'That would give anybody the sweats!' Jude teased. The second course arrived, tender pieces of delicate white fish fried in oil with lemon and fennel. They ate slowly, savouring every delicious mouthful.

'It's interesting that Beata turned down the Harvard job.'

'Like she said, she wants to stay here in Venice. Her work's here and her reputation. She's getting quite a name for herself in academic circles lucky sod. I wish I were,' he added wistfully.

Jude knew the pressure would be on David when they returned to Cambridge and the Michaelmas term began. Once his manuscript was bound it would be read by two external examiners, followed by his viva. Then what? They'd talked about his future several times. Jude had suggested he apply for some of the junior lectureships advertised in the *TES* but David had refused, saying he didn't want to go to Warwick or Southampton. He wanted to stay on at King's, as a research fellow, write books, and hang on until a junior fellowship materialised. Jude had listened to him, incredulous. Going from her limited experience, waiting around for one job to come up was a nightmare.

'You're mad,' she'd said.

'Maybe, but it's worth the risk,' he'd answered. Just before they'd left for Venice David's supervisor at King's had told him there was a research fellowship in the offing and rumour had it that Osborne was a dead ringer for the post.

'Anyway there's Gabriele,' David said, breaking into her line of thought.

'Who's he?'

'The Peril San Marco chap I was talking about. He's Beata's lover, though they're a bit discreet about it.'

'Oh, no. Not another Claudia and Jonathan?'

'No. They're different. They live for their work, then find time for each other. Luckily they both work at the university so at least they have the odd lunch together.'

'*Scusi, Signorina*,' said the waiter. '*Frutta*?'

After a cornucopia of peaches and raspberries they sat back replete and drank their coffee and Grappa. Afterwards they walked home, across San Marco and on through the quiet streets with only the echo of their footsteps disturbing the peace of the night. Signora Zorzi and Arturo had gone to bed but their son Remo was up. With a sleepy smile he handed over their keys then locked up for the night.

'*Buona notte*,' they whispered, and crept along the corridor to David's room where they fell on the bed, kissing and giggling, struggling with each other's clothes.

'There's so little of this I could blow it away,' murmured David as he slipped Jude's dress over her shoulders. 'Oh . . . why are you so beautiful?'

'Just to drive you mad,' she teased.

Moving along his body, she laid a line of kisses from his ribs to his flat belly and then down to his lean thighs. Sighing out her name, he pulled her on to him and eased open her thighs, entering slowly and gently. They moved together, bathed in the cool, night breeze that drifted in through the open shutters. Their whispered words of love mingled with the soft slap of water from the canal below their window and the snatch of a sentimental love song drifting in from Campo San Angelo.

The next day was cooler but brilliantly sunny.

'Does it ever rain?' asked Jude as they sat in a bar eating almond croissants and drinking cappuccino.

'It often floods - *acqua alta*, it's called. The high tides in the autumn and spring often put the city a couple of feet under water.'

'It must be a fabulous sight.'

'It is, I've seen it, but it's bad for Venice, adds even more to its pollution problems. Wait till you talk to Gabriele, he'll put the fear of God in you.'

They finished breakfast then walked to the university along quiet streets, off the tourist track. Only pigeons and toddlers playing in the squares disturbed the calm of the early morning. From open windows canaries trilled in their cages and geraniums spilled from the ledges, their trailing leaves caught up in the washing that flapped on lines strung out across the narrow *calli*. Suddenly they were by the water again.

'That's the university, over there,' said David, pointing out a graceful Gothic building on the turn of the Grand Canal. 'Ca' Foscari.' Jude looked up and down the canal.

'David, I don't see any bridges. How do we get over there?'

'The *traghetto*,' he said, nodding towards a gondola on the other side of the canal. It looked far too small and delicate for all the people piling into it. The *gondoliere* took their money then quickly plied his oar, zipping through the canal traffic until he reached the side of the bank where Jude and David were waiting with a growing number of customers.

'Ca' Foscari . . . l'Università!' called the *gondoliere*. As one set of passengers climbed off another jostled on.

'I'm sure we'll sink!' gasped Jude as the gondola bobbed dangerously low in the water. When they hit mid-stream and the gondola bounced deftly between a *vaporetto* and a police launch, Jude grabbed David's arm. The *gondoliere* blithely carried on and in minutes the gondola swooped into its mooring place where they all disembarked.

'Who was it who said you've not seen Venice until you've screwed in a gondola?' David asked.

'I don't know but I bet Arturo wasn't the *gondoliere*!'

They threaded their way through the streets and over the bridges and finally came to the gates of Ca' Foscari. The university courtyard, bright with oleanders, was packed with students standing around, smoking and talking. A few sat on benches, reading books but mostly it was a busy social scene with lots of noisy chatter and loud laughter.

'How come Italians make everything seem such fun?' mused Jude.

'I don't know, but their constant nattering can really grind you down at times.'

The English faculty seemed to consist of nothing more than a large, stuffy lecture room and a beautiful library.

'Is this it?' asked Jude, looking around for more.

'There are a couple more lecture rooms down the corridor and studies for the *professori*. Come on, I'll show you Beata's study. She lets me camp out in a corner while I'm here.'

He led Jude into a pretty room overlooking a Renaissance courtyard with a white marble well in the centre, draped in purple bougainvillaea. The room was unmistakably Beata's. Cool and elegant, it was furnished in a fascinating mixture of English and Venetian antiques. Beata's desk was of English oak, with a roll top and lots of little drawers and cupboards. A magnificent Venetian bureau took up the length of one wall, stacked with books and papers. Jude quickly glanced at the books, again an intriguing mixture of English and Italian, predominantly poetry, many of which looked like expensive first editions. On her desk was a photograph of herself outside New College and a small photograph in a delicate silver frame of a young man with the most beautiful smile.

'That's Gabriele,' David said as Jude stared at the photograph. 'You'll probably bump into him later.' He stopped and picked up a note, lying on the little table that was his desk. 'Typical Beata,' he said, reading the note aloud to Jude. '"Here are some of your references – meet me in the library for more." What a brick!' he said, going through

a huge pile of books on the table. 'Well, that's me sorted for the next few days.'

'Hey, this is a holiday too,' she reminded him.

'Sweetheart,' he murmured, kissing her golden hair, 'how could I ever forget?'

'Easily. You're a workaholic. Even here, in the most romantic city in Europe.'

'Especially here,' David whispered, pointing to a striking reproduction of Byron hanging on the wall over Beata's desk. 'All because of him.'

'Bastard!'

'Come and look at the view, it's so much more interesting than having a row with me,' he said, taking her arm and guiding her out of the room, along a corridor at the end of which were double panelled doors with circles of old glass in the centre panes. Throwing them open David walked out on to a balcony and Jude stopped dead, her breath caught in her throat. The Ca' Foscari, built on the '*Volta di Canale*', commanded magnificent views of some of the finest buildings in Venice.

'The Rialto's back there,' he said, pointing left. 'Santa Maria della Salute is down there, and beyond that is the lagoon.'

'I don't think I'll ever get my bearings,' she laughed.

'Signore Osborne, *telefono*,' called a woman's voice from from the end of the corridor.

'Sorry, love,' he said, hurrying away.

Jude leaned over the balustrade.

'*Bellissima*,' she sighed.

'*Veramente*.'

She jumped, instantly recognising the man smiling at her.

'You're Gabriele,' she said, holding out her hand. 'I've just seen a photograph of you in Beata's room. I'm Jude Summers, David's er . . . *fidanzata*.' She said the word uncomfortably, making Gabriele laugh.

'Gabriele Girotto,' he said, taking her hand. '*Molto piacere*.'

'David tells me you work for Peril San Marco?'

'I try to but there's never enough money. It's only a charity and Venice needs billions if it's to be saved. A law banning those monstrosities would help too.'

He scowled at two speedboats crashing along the water. 'They do more damage in a day than the old boats did in a year.'

'How?'

'That, times a thousand thousand!' He pointed to the waves that bounced in the wake of the speedboats. 'The impact of that water, smashing against foundations laid over a thousand years ago, is catastrophic. Remember this city was built for gondolas. Big launches like the *vaporetti* are bad enough for churning up the waters but these little speedboats zipping up and down the canal are like insects eating away at the foundations.'

Jude stared at him, horrified.

'So why isn't there a law stopping them?'

'Bad for tourism. Money is everything, nothing else matters.'

Just then David bobbed his head round the door.

'Hi, Gabriele! Sorry, love. I've got to sign some papers to get first editions out of the library. The bureaucracy here is a nightmare. I think I'll be a long time.' He smiled apologetically.

'That's OK,' said Gabriele. 'I'll show Jude Palazzo Giardino and take in the church of Madonna dell'Orto on the way.'

Jude sprang to her feet, saying, 'This sounds like the beginning of an adventure.'

Oddly enough, it was.

They walked along the Strada Nuova, packed with people trying to buy lunch before the shops closed for the afternoon.

'Down here,' said Gabriele, turning into a dark *calle* right off the tourist track. 'This area is Cannaregio.'

Jude walked alongside him, fascinated by the tiny streets

with corner shops that spilled their goods right across the pavements.

'Here we are,' said Gabriele as they passed the church of Madonna dell'Orto and turned a corner into a shady square.

Palazzo Giardino. It's closed to the public because of all its broken stonework but we have hopes of restoring it soon, if we can get somebody from the Peril San Marco committee to sponsor us.'

Jude gaped at the once beautiful Palace with its sad crumbling arches and smashed windows.

'Surely you can't restore this!'

'We can restore anything. Sometimes we start off with nothing more than a few bricks and a fresco. This would be relatively easy. At least we have the original structure.'

She followed him as he walked around the garden, thick and overgrown with wild herbs. Little green lizards darted everywhere.

'It could be perfect again. We could repair the frescoes, rebuild the balcony, put the mosaics back, stone by stone.' He turned to her, eyes blazing with passion. 'This is the oldest Byzantine palace in Venice!' He smiled at her startled expression. 'Do you think I'm mad?'

'No. A visionary perhaps. I wouldn't know where to start.'

'Take a look through here,' said Gabriele, unlocking a metal gate set into the back wall. It creaked open, peeling orange rust, and Jude stepped through it, expecting to see a piazza or another garden. Instead she saw the lagoon shimmering before her, a haze of blue stretching far out into the dreaming horizon.

'It's so peaceful,' she sighed.

'It wasn't in the glory days,' said Gabriele. 'The old Venetians were a ruthless bunch of pirates, plundering and raping the whole of the Mediterranean.'

'I'm sticking to my romantic dreams.'

'Fine, but don't kid yourself, Jude. The Turks didn't just

give away their treasures. The Venetian army looted half of Constantinople for the glories of San Marco.'

'This must have been a fine spot for your pirates. Straight out of the back gate and there's the Adriatic, handy for business and no commuting.'

'*Esatto*. They weren't rulers of the sea for nothing. Come on, I'll show you inside the palazzo.'

The ground floor of the palazzo was wet and slimy, stinking of sewers.

'It's better upstairs, on the piano nobile,' said Gabriele. 'A lot of the original carvings still remain and some beautiful glass.'

In contrast to the damp below, upstairs was hot and dusty. Some of the delicate Byzantine windows were still intact and the balcony, though crumbling and unstable, gave a fine view of the garden to one side and the lagoon to the other.

'There's a storm coming,' said Gabriele, staring out to sea.

Jude nodded but she wasn't really listening. Her attention was held by the islands flung across the lagoon like a scatter of dark gems – Torcello, Murano and Burano.

'Oh, Gabriele, it would be tragic to lose such a wonderful place.'

He nodded and smiled, rather sadly.

'We do all that we can, Jude. Money would work miracles.'

'How much would it cost?'

'A lot. Samson's, the big food chain, have been our best sponsors recently but since they underpinned another palace last year we haven't been able to squeeze any more out of them.' He fingered the stonework of the balcony. 'We overspent quite considerably on that project. Pity. I think we pushed them too far.'

'Then you've got to charm them back.'

'I've tried, Jude, believe me.'

'Have you told them how special the Palazzo Giardino is, how unique?'

'Of course I have. You must remember they only have so much money to give to Peril San Marco. They support other charities too.'

'Yes, but this is special,' she said with rising passion.

'Then you speak to them,' he said, half jokingly. 'Your powers of persuasion might be better than mine.'

'Right, I will!'

He stared at her and patted her shoulder.

'Jude, how?'

'I'll make a radio programme and get it transmitted across Britain.'

Gabriele's jaw dropped and the smile faded from his face.

'*Che pazza*,' he said, tapping his head. 'You're mad.'

'Not at all. If you can get me a UHER, I'll make you a programme. It'll have to be something right on and relevant that Samson's will respond to.'

'Jude, excuse me for interrupting your train of thought, but what exactly is a UHER?'

'Sorry, it's a recording machine for radio.' She used her hands to sketch out its shape. 'A big cassette recorder.'

'*Ho capito*. I have a friend who works for *La Voce di Veneto*, he has such a machine. I can borrow it for sure. But, Jude, a word of warning, please.' He suddenly became very earnest and businesslike. 'Peril San Marco has had too many programmes made with throbbing violins and gondolas in the mist. We need action, energy – not death and doom. Nobody pays out money for a lost cause. Do you understand?'

'Perfectly. I'll have to think of a good angle.'

'Think about it on the way home. There's a storm about to break. Let's run for it.'

As they hurried down the Strada Nuova the rain began to fall.

'See you later, Gabriele,' said Jude, dashing across Campo Sant'Angelo.

'*Arrivederci*,' he called. 'See you tonight.'

David was fast asleep when she got back, taking an

afternoon nap in the heat of the storm. Jude gazed at him on the bed and realised with a pang how precious he was to her. Slipping off her wet clothes she climbed into bed beside him and laid her face against his warm flesh. Nine months had passed since her affair with Lucius. In the dark weeks that followed his rejection she'd not thought it possible she would ever love again, and then she'd met David. His love had given her hope and a new future. What would life be without him?

There was only one secret between them: her dreams. She dreamt of Lucius, hot dreams that made her wake with his name on her lips, his taste on her tongue. Images of him that made her shake with longing and burn with shame. They were a curse in Jude's new life, something to haunt her when she was most secure and contented. She pressed herself closer against David's chest.

'Darling,' he murmured, half asleep.

'Love me, love me.'

He pushed himself up on to one elbow and stared down into wonderful silver-grey eyes.

'Jude?'

'Love me, David,' she whispered.

Lifting her fragrant hair he pressed his face into it, kissing her neck and shoulders. He found her breasts and teased the velvet softness of her nipples with darting flicks of his tongue. Jude moaned and arched her back, asking for more. His hands smoothed the flatness of her belly and came to rest in the warmth of her open thighs.

'Witch!' he whispered as she slipped round and pressed her head into his thighs, where she started to tease and kiss him until he grew big and erect in her mouth. As she caressed him he sighed with pleasure and pulled her hips down on to his face, burying his mouth in her warm wetness. Kissing and licking, they brought each other to a point of ecstasy they'd never reached before. It was David who came first, filling her with a sweet rush then turning her over and gently fondling her until a great wave rolled down the length of her body and

broke in a sobbing burst of joy. Crying out his name, she clung to him, washed up on love.

Outside the storm gathered new strength. Zig-zag lightning danced across the sky followed by thunder and a torrential downpour. They curled up close and watched the storm unfold outside their window. Rain smashed against the shutters, sending them clattering against the wall and scattering the geraniums that stood in pots on the window ledge. The canals around them bounced with rain and all along the RIOS the thunder rolled like an angry monster. Suddenly through the thunder came a banging on their door.

'DAVID! D-A-V-I-D!' yelled Signora Zorzi. Jude rolled her face into the pillows and groaned.

'Is nothing sacred?' she fumed.

'Shhh!' he hissed and grabbing a damp towel he cautiously opened the door.

'David, *scusi, il telefono per la Signorina*.'

'Jude?' he stuttered.

'*Si*, Jude, please tell her.' The Signora nodded towards his room and with a knowing smile swept off down the corridor. David leaned against the door.

'She bloody well knows!'

Jude was out of bed and struggling with her clothes.

'Who is it? Who's phoning me here?'

'I dunno, I didn't ask.'

Pulling on her T shirt Jude bounded down the stairs two at a time and grabbed the phone that was lying on the desk in the foyer.

'Yes,' she almost shouted.

'Hi, Jude, what took you so long?'

Her grip on the phone loosened.

'Claudia! I don't believe it.'

'Don't believe that I could make a phone call to Venice? Come on, Jude, this is a technological age.'

'How did you know we were here?'

'David always stays with Signora Zorzi. Jude, I've got to make this brief, I'm on the office phone.'

'You've started! What's it like?'

'Brilliant. Listen, I've just heard along the grapevine that the Beeb are about to launch a major competition for the best new radio or television documentary.'

'Yeah?' asked Jude, nonplussed.

'You're entering.'

'Me! I haven't even started working for the BBC yet.'

'By the time the competition is underway you'll have had your feet under the table for three months. Hear me out.'

'I'm all ears.'

'It's a half-hour documentary by newcomers only. I'm entering too, and here's the best bit – the winner gets a grand. Interested?'

'Very.'

She could hear Claudia reading through some papers.

'Candidates have to research, write, present and edit their own programme.'

Jude gulped.

'The closing date is December so that gives you loads of time to practise on the editing machine. I'm phoning you now because I think it would be pretty cool to make a brilliant documentary on Venice. What do you reckon?'

Jude's eyes lit up.

'I reckon you're the best friend I've got!'

'Gotta go, Jude, here comes the boss. Think Byron, fish, sewers, Bellini, salami, Vivaldi . . .'

Click. The line went dead and Jude was left smiling into the mouthpiece.

'*Va bene*, Jude?' enquired Signora Zorzi.

'*Si, si, molto bene*.'

She skipped up the stairs and bounced into David's room.

'Who was it?' he asked.

'Claudia.'

'Oh, no, she's not coming?'

'No, she's got a brilliant idea.'

'That's even worse.'

'Listen – '

'No, if it's to do with Claude, it'll be a long story.' David sprang out of bed and grabbed his clothes. 'Tell me on the way to Beata's, we're already quarter of an hour late.'

The Lido, a popular seaside resort between the lagoon and the Adriatic, was a twenty-minute crossing from San Marco. They took the *motonave* this time, a ship complete with lower deck and snack bar, that shuttled back and forth to the Lido all day. At six the boat would have been teeming with families returning from the various beaches along the Lido; now it was half empty. They sat outside and watched the traffic criss-cross the lagoon, heading out to San Giorgio, the Giudecca, Porto Marghera and the Lido. A couple of enormous ocean-going cruisers had docked way up the Riva degli Schiavoni, huge white boats with enormous funnels that dwarfed all the other boats moored up beside it. A gondola flicked around the vast prow of a liner, looking rather like a dragonfly behind a mammoth.

'What a glorious place this is,' Jude murmured, her head on David's shoulder as they sat and watched as the sun's rays fire the domes of the basilica of San Marco. The last of the storm clouds rolled east towards the coast of Yugoslavia and the evening sky was the purest of pale blues. As they boarded the *motonave* Jude had told David about Claudia's idea; now she was silent, her eyes large and dreamy as she watched the moon rise.

'It'd be great if you won a thousand quid!' he said, jolting her back to the world of money and success. Jude gazed down at the foam creaming the prow of the ship and smiled.

'Claudia suggested I did a piece on Venice. She said fish, Vivaldi, salami, Bellini, spaghetti . . .'

'She would!'

'But I've got something new. Something totally brilliant.' She paused, a smile curving her lovely lips. 'Samson's!'

David's expectant grin disappeared. 'Great,' he answered flatly.

'No, listen,' she cried, grabbing his arm. 'Gabriele's just been telling me how brilliant Samson's are. They've given thousands to the Peril San Marco scheme but it needs thousands more.'

'Yes, Jude, I've known Gabriele for three years and he's told me umpteen times how generous Samson's are. I just wish they'd give me student discount on their wine,' he added flippantly.

Taking his face firmly between her hands, Jude said slowly and emphatically, 'Read my lips. I'm going to do a programme on Samson's in Venice for the BBC competition Claudia's just told me about. OK?' She loosened her grip and watched the idea filter through. Suddenly he smiled.

'Jude, I've got to hand it to you, it's pretty damn cool.'

'Good for everybody – you, me, Samson's and Venice.'

'A word of advice,' said David, as the boat pulled into the Lido. 'Take it easy with Gabriele. He's very temperamental and he hates being heavied.'

'I guarantee he'll love this one,' she promised. 'Just think of the coverage if I win.'

They hurried down the main street that ran from one side of the island to the other. Suddenly the street stopped and the sea sparkled before them. Jude looked around.

'Where are we?'

'We've just walked the entire breadth of the Lido and you didn't even notice.'

'It's so small I didn't have time,' she answered.

'Beata lives here.'

He pointed to an elegant white villa flanked by tall palms. Beata was on the balcony, elegant in rose-coloured silk.

'*Ciao*!' she called. 'Come up, the door's open.'

The automatic gate clicked open and they walked across the rain-drenched garden, sweet with the smell of damp roses. Beata came down to meet them.

'You've just missed the most spectacular storm,' she said, kissing them lightly on both cheeks.

'It was pretty good over in Venice,' said David, smiling knowingly at Jude. 'I certainly felt the earth move.' Jude blushed and quickly skipped up the steps ahead of Beata.

'This is a wonderful house.'

'Let me show you around.' She linked an arm through Jude's and led the way upstairs. 'This is the *salone*.' It was a wide, airy room, stretching from the front of the house right the way to the back. 'My father designed the house so that all the living rooms would be up here on the first floor to take advantage of the view.' She threw the balcony doors open and Jude looked out over a vast stretch of beach and the sea.

'*Ciao*!' called Gabriele from the kitchen. 'I've chilled some Prosecco for you.' He appeared with a bottle and glasses. '*Salute*,' he said as he handed round the wine. The wine was followed by a superb meal cooked by Gabriele. They ate on the balcony, overlooking the sea, their happy voices muted by the crashing waves on the shore.

'Jude's had a brilliant idea for Peril San Marco,' enthused David over their second course.

Jude swallowed her chicken. She had thought of introducing the BBC connection a little more subtly.

'Remember we talked about media coverage this afternoon?' she reminded Gabriele.

'Not more documentaries of a doomed city?' laughed Beata.

'No, no. I was thinking along the lines of a hard hitting documentary,' Jude explained to Beata then quickly turned to Gabriele. 'I've just heard about a competition that's being launched by the BBC.'

He burst out laughing. 'Goodness, Jude. We only discussed such a possibility this afternoon.'

'I know, but I'm a fast worker and I've got friends in the business.' She paused to sip some acqua minerale. 'I want to do Samson's in Venice. There's money in it, Gabriele, a thousand pounds, which we'd split – if I won.'

She stopped talking and gave him time to think.

'What would be your angle, Jude?' he asked.

'The work you do for Peril San Marco, the cultural image Samson's have here as opposed to the cut-price supermarket chain we're all so familiar with in England.'

'It could be good,' he said cautiously.

'It's a winner,' David added.

They talked so late they missed the last boat back to Venice and finished up spending the night in Beata's guest room. When Jude awoke she lay still and listened to the sounds around her: the soft thump of the open shutter in the breeze, the flick of palm leaves outside the window and the endless racket of cicadas. She crept out of bed and wrapped a towel from the bathroom around her naked body then opened their bedroom door which gave on to a white marble court surrounding a pool. Flat, blue and shimmering, it invited guests. Without a moment's hesitation Jude dropped the towel and dived in. The smack of cold water funnelled round her like a shock.

Reaching the bottom of the pool she rolled along, opening her body to the refracted light of the sun piercing the still blue waters. Suddenly the surface broke, like splintering glass, and with an explosion another body entered and skimmed the water just above her head. With lungs aching Jude surfaced and quickly grabbed her discarded towel. Wrapping it around herself, she waited for Gabriele to surface. He came up smiling, his hair wet and curling around his face.

'*Ciao*. Have you had breakfast?'

Jude gazed up at the aquamarine sky.

'Who cares about food on a morning like this?'

'I do.'

Settling into a wicker lounger, Jude lay back and felt her skin open to the soft pull of the sun.

'Mmmmm,' she said with a smile and dozed off. She awoke to the clatter of crockery and saw Gabriele lay a small table with coffee, fresh bread, jam and goat's cheese.

'Maybe I am hungry after all.'

'Eat, we've a lot to do today,' he said, pouring out coffee and handing her a cup. 'First we'll go to the office and phone Mr Brownjohn.'

'Who's he?' Jude asked, her mouth full of bread and cheese.

'My Samson's contact.'

'We have a contact? We're in business.'

The Peril San Marco office was in St Mark's Square, in a room in the Doges' Palace with crumbling stucco and a threateningly heavy ceiling.

'Maybe you should have restored this place first off,' Jude said, gazing at the sagging plaster.

'It'll outlast us, don't worry,' said Gabriele. He phoned Mr Brownjohn in London who seemed interested but not riveted by the outlined proposal for Palazzo Giardino.

'We did rather stretch ourselves with the last project,' he gently reminded Gabriele. 'However, fax me the details. You know how dear Venice is to our heart.'

Jude eventually managed to talk to their publicity spokeswoman, a Ms Susie Millerchip who seemed to have a right-on approach to life.

'This sounds like something special, Jude.'

'It is, I promise you. You get to save the palazzo, and all the publicity you need.'

'An offer we can't refuse?' Ms Millerchip joked.

'Absolutely,' Jude laughed, thinking they'd be insane to turn it down.

The following morning Mr Brownjohn phoned Gabriele.

'We're certainly interested in your new proposal.' Gabriele put his thumb in the air and Jude danced a jig around the office.

'Ms Millerchip and I would like to fly out and see the palazzo in its present condition.'

'Of course.'

'Also Miss Summers. We're keen to meet her too.'
'Absolutely.'
'Would tomorrow be too early?'
Gabrielle gulped but continued calm and urbane.
'No problem.'
'What's up?' asked Jude as he put down the phone.
'They're coming tomorrow.'
'Yeah!' she cried, flinging her arms around his neck.

Ms Millerchip and Mr Brownjohn could not have been more different. Jude and Gabriele were waiting for them at Marco Polo airport. Mr Brownjohn was dressed entirely in brown, and Ms Millerchip wore daffodil yellow and red lipstick that never lost its gloss.

'James Brownjohn, pleased to meet you, Miss Summers.'
'Susie Millerchip. Wow! What a place.'

In the taxi across the lagoon Susie talked non-stop; keen questions, sharp observations, amazing memory . . . Ms Millerchip was definitely on their case. Mr Brownjohn was remote, polite and understated; he noticed everything and recorded it in his notebook. Jude wondered how they could possibly work together. She was to be pleasantly surprised. They spent the first day at Palazzo Giardino, inspecting the plans and talking to the restorers. Later they visited the Municipio where Gabriele was able to show them historical records of the building. By evening they had a deal.

'OK, you're on,' said Susie, after an hour-long phone call with head office. 'I've convinced the powers that be this is a guaranteed winner on two counts. *Primo*,' she said, holding up an imperious forefinger, 'you're gonna restore this famous Byzantine palace to its former glory and pull more tourists than the Pope himself.'

'Well, maybe,' said Gabriele with a wry smile. Ms Millerchip, on a roll, ignored his reservations, and up went another finger to form a big V for victory.

'I've checked out Jude.' She smiled semi-apologetically.

'She's a new girl with the BBC.' Jude blushed at Susie Millerchip's knowing smile. 'But I'm told she's bright, keen, and ambitious.' The character description sounded like a quote from Ivan Ward at BBC Radio Cambridgeshire. 'So I'll go with that and back her in this worthy cause.'

As Susie finished, Jude and Gabriele fell on her, laughing with relief. Mr Brownjohn adjusted his bifocals and looked quietly pleased.

'What about the documentation?' he enquired.

'Being faxed right now,' said Susie. 'Now, come on, James loosen up. I need a drink.'

Things moved quickly after that. James and Susie had a week in Venice with Jude trailing them on all their visits, lugging the UHER in boiling temperatures. She recorded them in all sorts of situations with all sorts of different people – and it all sounded as dull as ditchwater.

'What's wrong with me?' she raged as she played back her first day's recording. 'We all sound so wooden.' She slammed down the lid of the machine and stomped across the room to the open window.

'Come on, Jude, this is your first day,' reasoned David. She grunted and turned her head from him, tears stinging her eyes.

'I thought it was all going to be so easy,' she sighed, leaning on the sill and staring into the *rio* below. 'Here I am, in the most beautiful city in Europe, and I manage to make it sound as boring as Clapham Junction!' She pushed the shutters wide open. 'Why can't I get that?'

They listened to the sounds of the city, the call of children, the clatter of pots and pans in kitchens overhanging the *calli*, the chug of the *vaporetti*, the slap of water – the voice of Venice.

'That's impossible, unless you're in a gondola.' As David stopped speaking they stared at each other.

'A *gondola*!' they yelled together.

'Arturo!' cried Jude, and was out of the room in a flash.

Arturo was delighted.

'*Certo, certo,*' he said, beaming at Jude. '*Piacere.*'

'*Tante grazie*, Arturo, *ma io voglio . . .*' She stumbled on, determined to say her piece. '*La moglie.*' She pointed at Signora Zorzi. 'I want you to come too, Signora,' she said in a rush of excited English.

'Me!' exclaimed the Signora. '*Perché?*'

'Because we need a translator,' chipped in David who'd joined them all in the kitchen. 'Jude will ask the questions, Arturo will answer the easy ones – *per esempio, sì o no*,' he joked with Arturo.

'*Sì* or *no* is enough,' he smiled.

'And you, Signora, will answer the more complicated questions, if that's OK?'

Signora Zorzi spread her hands in the air and smiled proudly.

'*Va bene, caro.*'

'Brilliant!' said Jude, exploding with enthusiasm. 'We'll cruise up the Grand Canal and approach the palazzo from the lagoon.'

'Darling,' smiled David. 'Nobody understands a word you're saying.'

Signora Zorzi stroked Jude's glowing cheeks.

'*Tesora*, you will win, I feel it in my 'eart.'

'The Champion!' laughed Arturo, suddenly remembering his World Cup repertoire.

'*D'accordo,*' cried Jude. 'The Champion!'

The day she spent in Arturo's gondola was one of the most perfect of her life. He met them outside the Ca' d'Oro, deftly weaving his way through the busy traffic on the Grand Canal. Jude couldn't believe this handsome, greying *gondoliere* in the tight black trousers and striped red top was the same man who sat in the Zorzis' kitchen,

watching television with his braces pulled up over his white string vest.

'*Che bravo*!' applauded his wife as Arturo brought the gondola to a stop and helped her aboard. Jude smiled at the glow of pride that passed between them. Twenty years of marriage and they were still in love.

'*Avanti, Signorina.*'

Jude wobbled her way into the immaculate gondola, with its gleaming leather seats and flashing chromework.

'*Che bella*!' she enthused, madly searching around for a more fitting expression. '*La bellissima*!'

Arturo bowed elegantly and with a flourish set off. In contrast to the *vaporetti*, the gondola seemed precariously small as it dipped along the water. The buildings suddenly took on immense proportions and the lapping water, usually so soft and romantic, had a new challenging vigour. Jude crouched in the bottom of the boat, re-setting the levels on the UHER to accommodate the noisy smack of water all around. Her original plan to talk her way down the Grand Canal was speedily abandoned; the racket of the traffic would drown any speech. She would have to add her own voiceover at a later date.

Once they'd negotiated the chaos of the Rialto Bridge, the Canal suddenly fell strangely quiet. Just before the Giustinian, Arturo swooped right and entered a tiny *rio* that wound its way through the quiet backwaters of the city. The interview with Arturo and Graziella, as Signora Zorzi insisted on being called throughout the afternoon, was a joy. As they passed a fine baroque palace dripping red geraniums from its balconies, Arturo pointed at it.

'Byron, 'e live 'ere.'

Jude looked suitably impressed.

'Really! I never knew.'

'Take it easy, Jude, he makes it up as he goes along,' hissed David. 'It's poetically convincing but a complete load of balls.' He was right. By the end of their trip Byron had

lived in eight different palaces, James Joyce two, Dickens four, Shakespeare five, and the 'Great Caruso' at least ten. Jude didn't give a damn. She was too excited to be bothered by historical detail and knew what Arturo didn't: that she could edit out whatever was irrelevant when she got back to England.

Arturo and Graziella chatted unselfconsciously about their love for Venice and the increasing sadness they felt at its steady destruction. They praised the work of Peril San Marco, taking care to point out different buildings along the route that had been restored by the organisation. Arturo, who couldn't keep his mind off gondolas for more than ten minutes, somehow managed time and again, in halting, broken English, to drag the conversation back to the ancient skill of gondoliering. He took them to Squero di San Trovaso, the boatyard where Venice's gondolas had been built for centuries. Several of them lay turned upside down like shiny black beetles, waiting to be repaired. With Arturo giving his guided tour, Jude needed all her extra tapes.

She was so preoccupied with changing tapes she never realised they'd left the quiet backwaters and entered the lagoon. Arturo stopped talking and turned his attention to the choppy waves. They passed San Michele, the island cemetery, where Arturo crossed himself before quickly skimming on his way. For the first time Jude approached Palazzo Giardino from the water and was suddenly aware of how the old merchants would have seen their homes as they headed in, across the lagoon, laden with booty. She could see the balcony of the palazzo and the waving fronds of the tall palms that enclosed its garden. As they drew close Gabriele waved to them.

'*Ciao*!'

Arturo drifted in, soft as a ripple, and helped them out.

'Will you be OK?' David whispered as he saw Jude's face grow tense.

'I think so, I just wish I didn't have such a big audience.'

She nodded towards a group of local artisans already deep in conversation with Mr Brownjohn, Susie and the Zorzis.

'Don't worry. They'll be more fascinated by the UHER than you.'

'David, you have a great way of making me feel really important!'

'Ready?' called Gabriele.

'*Pronto*,' she answered, checking her script.

'I bet you ten thousand lire you won't use that,' said David, nodding at the sheets of paper fluttering on her clip board.

'You must be joking!'

But he was right. The minute the artisans, who knew the site well and were keen to get to work, started talking the interview took on almost the same pattern as the one with the Bishop of Ely. Initially Jude clung to her script like a lifeline but as the restorers grew more and more involved in their description of the project, so did she. Though they'd seen her around, with Gabriele, they'd never met her in an official capacity and certainly not with a UHER. In their enthusiasm to impress the BBC they insisted that she see everything, from the waterlogged foundations to the roof. Laughing at their enthusiasm, Jude abandoned her script and let the interview go their way. Language didn't seem a problem. Occasionally Gabriele did a bit of translating but most of the time they made themselves perfectly clear. When the final tape flicked out of the spool and fluttered in the breeze, Jude flopped to the ground and gratefully accepted a glass of mineral water from Signora Zorzi.

'That's it,' she sighed, relief washing over her like a warm shower.

'*Salute*,' said Signora Zorzi.

'*Auguri*,' said Arturo, with a big, proud smile.

The Peril San Marco piece, from conception to completion, had taken nearly two full weeks out of their three week holiday.

'So much for me being a workaholic,' David grumbled. By the time Jude's programme was in the can they'd two days left and David spent every hour in the Ca' Foscari library with Beata, trying to finish his endless footnotes. In exchange for all the support he'd given her during the making of her programme, Jude tried to help him, but David and Beata seemed to have everything under control.

'Go and say your goodbyes,' David said.

'I have no goodbyes to say. I'm coming back.'

As their holidays dwindled away so did the summer and Jude saw another side of Venice, a darker more sombre city, wrapped about with mist or rain. She loved the dull colours of the sea and sky almost as much as the bright azure blue she'd grown accustomed to. It focused her eyes on the city instead of the view.

Her last days in Venice were spent on her own. Gabriele left for a conference in Rome; Beata and David were incarcerated in the library from dawn till dusk. On their last evening Signora Zorzi cooked them a farewell supper and Arturo gave Jude a signed photograph of himself as a dashing young *gondoliere*. She and David made love for the last time, to the sound of rain falling on their shutters, and then packed their bags. The holiday was over.

At six the next morning they sat yawning in a smoky bus heading for Marco Polo airport. Jude's last sight of Venice was a tumble of terracotta roof tops and tall bell towers bathed in the light of a bright new day. When the bus looped right for the airport Venice, like a dream, was gone.

David fell asleep on the flight back but Jude stayed awake and wrote a detailed diary of her visit, the first of many she was sure, though she already had a store of memories to last a lifetime. As the blue sky over the Swiss Alps turned a drab grey and rain slanted against her porthole window Jude knew, even before they dropped height, that she'd come back home to England.

Chapter Six

Autumn had hit East Anglia a lot sooner than it reached the Mediterranean. Cambridge was cold when they got back, David's riverside room was damp and smelt of mould, and suddenly Jude had nowhere to put her clothes.

'Did you buy new stuff in Venice?'

'Two T shirts,' she answered, staring at the drawers bulging with David's socks and sweaters.

'I don't understand,' he said, puzzled.

'I do. I've outgrown this room.'

With David's footnotes completed and typed up, his thesis was now in the hands of two external examiners, and for the first time in their relationship, he had time on his hands.

'Let's go out tonight.'

'David, I start work tomorrow.'

'So? Let's celebrate.'

'I want a bath and an early night,' said Jude crossly.

'Great. Let's have the bath together and make love all night.'

Jude turned to snap at him and saw that he was laughing at her.

'You're winding me up!' she cried.

'Loosening you up, I hope. You're so tense.'

'I know.'

'Come on, dinner'll do you good.'

They walked through the meadows to the Green Man at Grantchester and had steak, chips, and the cheapest bottle of red wine in the pub.

'Good luck, love,' said David, draining the last of the plonk into her glass.

'Thanks.' She sipped the wine and peered at him over the rim of the glass. 'David, I want to move.'

'Move what? Jobs, men, house, seats?'

'Stop it,' she laughed. 'I want us to have our own place.'

'You mean, live together?'

'Yes,' she said, checking the expression on his face.

'Haven't we been doing that all summer?'

'Yes, but not in our own place.'

Jude was surprised by the awkward pause that followed.

'You don't want to?'

He looked up quickly. 'I want to be with you, Jude, yes.'

'But?'

'I . . .' He floundered, lost for words.

Jude took her eyes from his downcast face and stared at the wall. Their love had grown so strong she'd never doubted for a moment he would feel the same as her.

'I'm sorry, I've assumed too much.'

'Darling.' He grabbed her hand and kissed it. 'Believe me, it's not you.'

'That's a relief,' she half-joked. 'Is it the money? Can't you afford to move out of your college room?'

He shook his head. She waited.

'I just love living in King's.'

A long awkward silence fell between them. Jude thought back to the conversations she'd had, first with Claudia and later with Jonathan. They'd both told her, jokingly and seriously, that no way would David ever choose to leave King's. It wasn't just his ivory tower, it was his spiritual home.

'You'll have to carry David out of college in a coffin!' Claudia had joked.

She was right. It was all-important to him; like a reconstructed womb. Taking a deep breath, Jude steadied her wildly conflicting emotions. Why had she never even seen

what was obvious to everyone else? Why had she made suppositions about their relationship?

'I thought you loved me?'

David clung on to her hand like a lifeline.

'I do, Jude. I do!'

She looked through brimming eyes into his stricken face and felt a surge of pity. She loved this man. The goodness in him, his purity and generosity. If she were to keep him she must accept the status quo. He had never lied to her or deceived her. It was she, driven by sentiment, who'd effected this rift.

'Jude . . .' he murmured. 'I don't want to hurt you.'

She couldn't quite understand why she wasn't angry. Instead she felt sad and foolish and rather sorry for him. Releasing his hand she said, 'You must understand that I can't live in King's any more?'

'Yes, yes. Of course I do.'

'I came for the summer and it's over.' She paused then added, 'I'm not sure what you imagined happening after that?' He shrugged, as if trying to shake off the answer.

'You need King's, I don't, so I'll look around for my own place – '

Suddenly he interrupted her.

'If you can bear with my neurosis, Jude, it might be *our* place . . . one day,' he finished lamely.

Now it was her turn to shrug.

'That decision lies with you,' she said curtly. 'I've made my decision, I just got my timing wrong. Let's leave it at that.'

They walked home through Grantchester Meadows in subdued silence. It was dark by the time they reached the first set of street lights on the edge of town and David gently slipped his arm around her waist.

'Jude, forgive me?'

Smiling bleakly, she kissed his cheek and said with feigned cheerfulness: 'Come on. I've a job to start tomorrow.'

Arm in arm they hurried down the Backs and through King's gate just as a shower of rain started to fall. Running across the court to David's room, Jude knew with foreboding that something had shifted in their relationship. The romance was over, reality had set in and David had laid the first ground rule. Maybe this was the end. Maybe she'd forced him too far. Jude lifted her face to the falling rain. Life had taken a new direction. So be it.

The next day she arrived far too early and sat at her desk nervously wondering what to do. The first person to show up was an enormously fat woman in orange leggings.

'Hi, I'm Jo,' she beamed. 'Bill's out interviewing. He said to make yourself at home, he'll be back by twelve. I see you've got a desk.' She nodded at the dirty tubular table Jude had been allocated. 'We do things in style here.'

A young man from the news room came wandering through.

'Hi, Jo,' he said. 'Had a good weekend.'

'No.'

'Want to rent a house?'

'I will if he carries on watching bleeding football instead of bonking.' Jo laughed. 'Eddie Ross, meet Jude Summers.' She nodded across the room to Jude. 'Bill's new researcher.'

Eddie smiled.

'Welcome, hope you survive. Few do. Want to rent a house?'

'Yes!' she said with unexpected force.

'What, right now?' joked Eddie.

'Absolutely right now!'

A thin, middle-aged man walked in, stinking of cigarettes and last night's beer.

'Piss off, you lot, this is a radio station, not a bloody letting agency.'

'Ignore Brian,' said Eddie. 'He's a peevish old queen. I'll speak to you later, Jude.'

Pulling a cross face at Brian, he disappeared into the news

room. Jo started to open her mail and Jude wondered what to do next. Feeling very self-conscious she moved the phone on her desk to make room for her bag and papers.

'Put that down!' snapped Brian.

'Wh-what?'

'Put the bloody phone down.'

'Sorry,' she mumbled, quickly putting the phone back to where it had been. Awkwardly casting about for something to do she reached out and started to fiddle with the typewriter.

'That's mine too.'

This time she didn't apologise.

'Is there anything here I can use?'

'You've taken over the bloody typing table.'

Jude stared down at her dirty desk and burst out laughing.

'*This* is the typing table?'

'Was – and that's my phone.'

Jude was beginning to feel very embarrassed. All she needed on her first day was somebody ticking her off every time she moved. Luckily Jo clarified the tense situation.

'We used to keep the spare typewriter on that desk not that it ever worked so nobody ever used it,' she added pointedly, glaring at Brian. 'And that's a spare phone, for general office use. Brian nabbed it for laying bets. That's why he's annoyed,' she added airily, completely ignoring his sulky expression. 'Don't take anything he says personally, Jude, it'll make him even bitchier.'

Jo swanned off like it was no big deal. Brian grunted. Jude tried diplomacy.

'I'm sorry. Ward showed me to this desk and gave me the phone.'

'Ward's an arsehole!'

Jude decided one of them had to behave like an adult.

'Couldn't we come to an agreement? The typewriter Where can I put it so that we can all use it when it's working?'

Brian looked as if he was going to tell her exactly where but Jo breezed by and said, 'Dump the fucker over there,' nodding at a small table by the toilets.

'Wouldn't it be better if I sat over there with it?' Jude asked, keen to get away from Brian.

'No way,' Jo answered. 'A researcher needs a telephone, doesn't she, Brian?'

Jude lugged the ancient manual machine across the room then hovered close to Jo for safety.

'Brian's in a bad mood,' she whispered.

'I noticed!'

'He hates Ward,' Jo added.

'What's that to do with me?' Jude asked, forcing herself not to snap at Jo who, so far, was the only person who'd been nice to her.

'You'll soon discover logic doesn't apply here. Fancy a brew?'

Jude wondered if it weren't too early for a break. Shouldn't she be doing something creative and constructive? Reading her thoughts, Jo blithely said, 'Don't worry. Bill won't mind. He always needs a pot of tea before he can even face the morning papers.'

The office kitchen was filthy, overflowing with dirty pots and greasy chip papers.

'The students come in every Tuesday. They do one little programme, Out of the Blue, and leave enough crap for an entire outside broadcast. Dirty sods!' said Jo, attacking the sink with Jif. Jude looked at the mess scattered around the room and wondered if Claudia and Jonathan had been as untidy when they were producing their student programme.

When they'd washed and dried the pots Jo set a third cup on the tray.

'For Brian.'

Jude wondered whether to lace it with poison. At least that'd put him out of his misery.

'The trouble is the old queen feels threatened by beautiful

young things. Believe me, Jude, it'd be much worse if you were a boy.'

She couldn't help but smile at Jo's bouncing optimism.

'So, is he annoyed with me because I'm young and not a boy, or because I'm young and I've taken his phone, his desk and his typewriter?'

Jo lit a cigarette and inhaled thoughtfully.

'He's annoyed because he had a row with Eddie last night. They're lovers, but Brian's on the way out. Eddie's young and a bit of a tart,' she added confidentially. 'Brian'll be fine by eleven, I promise you.' Jo poured hot water on to their instant coffee. 'He'll have sunk his first pint in the Flying Pig and forgotten everything, believe me.'

She carried the tray out into the office, still puffing on her cigarette, and Jude followed in her wake, grateful for her guide through the minefield of Radio Cambridgeshire office politics.

'There we are, lovie,' said Jo, placing a mug of coffee by Brian. 'Now be nice to our new girl or she won't answer your fan letters.'

Brian looked up, smiled thinly and took a slug of hot coffee.

'I'll try,' he answered.

Jude wasn't at all convinced.

'That's a good lad,' Jo soothed. 'Take her round.'

'What, now?' he asked.

'Yeah, before the studios fill up.'

'OK, when I've finished my coffee,' said Brian nicely.

'I'll have a little word with Eddie while you're gone,' Jo promised, sotto voce.

Brian's mood changed instantly. 'Ready, love?' he said to Jude who looked nervously at Jo.

'Go on. He won't bite.'

Studio 1 was on air; 2 was being set up for the lunchtime programme.

'In here,' said Brian, opening the door to the observation box. 'That's Tim, the station's heart throb.' He nodded towards a trendy young man in Studio 1. 'The listeners say he's got a sexy voice. Doesn't do anything for me. The frazzled-looking blonde is Sue, his PA. In 2 we have Ms Maggie Menzies. Poison!' The tense-looking woman he was referring to sat in Studio 2 working the control panels of the desk. 'She doesn't like you, kiddo.'

'She hasn't even met me!'

'We're talking BBC politics here, nothing rational.'

Jude looked blank.

'She hasn't got a researcher. Bill has. Maggie's a very pissed off lady.'

'I see.'

'You don't, but you will. Come on, here's the record library.' It was stacked from floor to ceiling with records, tapes and CDs. 'Music for every mood,' he quipped, quickly sticking a stray Mantovani LP behind the radiator. 'That's one less to worry about.'

When they got back to the main office Bill was sitting at the editing machine, frowning. He smiled warmly at Jude then quickly turned his attention back to the Mayoress's interview.

'Why does the silly bag keep humming and hawing?' he grumbled. 'Jude, check it through while I brew up. We'll edit it together.'

Smiling at the endless brewing up that seemed to go on in the office, she sat down, glad to have something to do.

'Thanks for the tour, Brian,' she called as she saw him heading out of the door.

'No probs,' he answered cheerily and was gone.

'Off to the Flying Pig,' Jo explained. 'The sporting world usually meets in the pub at opening time. That's their excuse for being piss-heads, anyway.'

'Jude!' yelled Bill from the kitchen. 'Quick, we're late for the bloody morning meeting.'

On the way up he explained how the meetings worked. 'Basically we do a bit of planning and decide who gets what, otherwise we'd all be repeating ourselves. Local news is pretty poor so there's always a fight for the juicy stories.'

'You must have a rough idea, don't you?'

'Sort of. The morning stuff is mostly chat with lots of music and phone-ins.'

'I've heard it.'

'Crap, isn't it?'

She laughed. 'I never said that.'

'The phone-ins are a bleeding nightmare. We always get half a dozen fascists, your standard racist, and an escaped lunatic, usually hanging out in Grunty Fen.'

'Good radio!' she joked.

'My programme has less music and more interviews, mostly live, which is why I need a genius like you to help me organise myself.'

They'd reached the top landing and he flung open the door to Ward's room which was dense with smoke. Ivan Ward leapt to his feet and shook Jude by the hand.

'Smoker or non-smoker?'

'Passive!' she spluttered, and made for a spot by the slightly open window.

Ward zipped round the room introducing everybody all at once. 'Eddie and Anna, news room. Ian Smart, you've met.' Jude remembered the Programme Organiser's eyes undressing her at the interview. They were still doing it. 'Tom, sports editor – Brian's his assistant.'

Tom snorted at Brian's job description and added, 'When he's here.'

Ward ignored him and carried on. 'Sue Davies.' He pointed at the frazzled blonde who was smoking faster than anybody then nodded towards the other woman. 'Maggie Menzies, mid day slot.' Through a smoke screen Jude recognised the presenter Brian had warned her of. 'Last, but by no means least, Sukie Zol, the tea-time presenter.'

Sukie smiled lasciviously at Ward then turned hostile eyes on Jude. The Station Manager tore his eyes off Sukie's full rounded breasts.

'Folks, meet Jude Summers, Bill's new researcher.'

Maggie Menzies was in like a shot. 'How come Maxwell's so privileged?'

'He works hard,' Ward answered curtly. 'Shall we begin?'

'Like fuck we will!' snapped Maggie.

'If you've something to say about Jude's appointment, Maggie, can we talk later rather than waste working time?'

He eyeballed her across the room and the meeting began. Jude, excited and keen, couldn't understand why nobody showed a jot of interest in anything. People yawned and flicked through the morning papers until the Prime Minister's forthcoming visit to the University Debating Society came up.

'Bill,' said Ward. 'Sounds like your scene?'

'How about somebody else having a slice of the culture?' asked Eddie. 'We could do with something lively in the news room.'

'We could all do with something lively,' hissed Maggie. Jude noticed Sukie's wet smile and Ward's eyes lingering on her carefully exposed mid-thigh.

'You can edit down what Bill doesn't need,' he said, and brought the meeting to an abrupt end. The assembled staff looked mutinous but nobody said a thing, just stood up and grumpily filed out.

'Maggie, did you want a word?' asked Ward.

'I wouldn't waste my breath,' she said and stomped off. Sukie held back long enough for Ivan to run his hand over her shapely bottom, then he remembered Jude.

'Hold on,' he called.

Jude and Sukie sidled around each other, Sukie blatantly eyeing up the competition. Dismissing Jude as no threat she pouted unashamedly at Ward, blew him a wet kiss and left. Ward looked so hot and bothered Jude thought he'd wet

himself. With a gargantuan effort he pulled himself together and focused on Jude.

'Everything all right?'

'Fine, thanks.'

'Sorry the meeting turned a bit pissy. Maggie's been after a researcher all year. She won't get one working for me. Only star presenters like Bill, who produce quality programmes and pull the audiences, get privileges on my ship.' Ward stopped short and added, 'Watch out for her. She'll treat you like shit.'

'So I've been told.'

'Still, a woman with your intelligence can cope with a frustrated old cow like Maggie.'

Jude wondered what Maggie had done wrong, apart from being extremely rude, to deserve such a bad press. Obviously Sukie was doing all the right things in Ward's eyes. Hoping he wasn't expecting the same sort of treatment from her, Jude edged towards the door.

'Must be off, Bill's waiting.'

'Jolly good, chocks away!' boomed Ward.

Jude hurried downstairs and found Bill still swearing over the Mayoress's interview.

'Jude, can you edit?'

It was not the time to lie.

'Not quickly.'

He saw she was embarrassed.

'That's OK, I'll have you perfect by the end of the week. Meanwhile, get stuck into that lot.' He nodded towards a pile of letters in his in-tray. 'If they're interesting, book 'em in. If not, the usual polite rejection letter. The diary's on the desk. We've got nothing but blank spaces all of next week.'

Jude grabbed the diary like a lifeline.

'Choose the music for this afternoon. The guests are in the diary. Fit the mood to the music, know what I mean?'

She started on his letters and became so engrossed she forgot about the music.

'Ready?' he asked, half an hour before his show.

'For what?'

'Sweetheart, we've a programme due out at two.'

'The music!'

'Where is it?' he asked.

'I – er – ' she spluttered, but Jo, her guardian angel, bailed her out.

'I've done it,' she said, handing Jude a pile of records. 'Force of habit.'

'Oh, thanks,' Jude gasped, and grabbing the records she followed Bill to Studio 1.

Behind the scenes the programme was a shambles from start to finish. The MP turned up late, the financial analyst was drunk, and one of the CDs had a crack in it. It was a baptism of fire but Jude loved every minute of it and was impressed by Bill's cool professionalism.

I can learn a lot from him, she thought as he played himself smoothly out of the programme at 4.59 and the news room took over with the five o'clock bulletin.

'That's it,' he said, standing and stretching. 'Enjoy it?'

'Yes, but I haven't done much.'

'Real work starts tomorrow. I wanted you to watch the programme today and familiarise yourself with the desk, especially these things.' He pointed to a stack of neatly labelled plastic cases.

'These are cartridges,' he said, inserting the top one into the cassette player on the deck. 'This one's the station's theme tune. You'll be hearing it in your sleep before long.'

The two-line song on the cartridge ended in a sloppy croon:

'Radio Cambridgeshire, the sound of the county.'

Jude grimaced. 'Who invented that?'

'Not me. The rest,' he tapped the stack of cartridges, 'are mostly promotion material for the other programmes. We change them weekly to keep up the audience's interest. We need new ideas for promotions and competitions – that's

your department, Jude. We'll also need a new trail every day. That's your baby too.'

'Trail?'

'A teaser. You know the sort of thing. "Bill Maxwell's Coffee-time" – that's my trendy title by the way – "today's bumper-packed bundle of scintillating guests . . . blah-blah-blah." Get the idea?'

She nodded nervously.

'I've booked the studio every night this week so that I can teach you how to work the panel.' Jude opened her mouth to thank him but he was at the door, pulling on his coat. 'See you tomorrow. I'm off to see an embryo transplant.'

The office was quiet. Nearly everybody was out and the phones were miraculously silent. Jude made a cup of tea and carried on with Bill's correspondence, even booking in a couple of guests for the following week. Feeling rather pleased, she decided it was time to call it a day. Just as she was leaving Eddie popped his head round the door.

'Brian around?'

'No, he went to the pub.' Jude didn't like to add he'd been there seven hours.

'Were you serious about renting a house?'

'Yes.'

'OK, here's the key. Take a look and let me know.'

'Now?'

He nodded.

'The ad goes into the *Evening News* tomorrow night so you've got first refusal.' He handed her the key. 'It's my mother's house, two up, two down, but the garden's enormous.'

Jude's heart began to race with excitement.

'I'll go right away.'

* * *

The house was in Maltings Lane and faced directly on to the common. It was built of old, red brick and had large bay windows, overlooking the mill pond and Newnham College.

It's like coming home, she thought as she turned the key in the lock.

It was perfect – tiny but perfect. Downstairs was one long room with a kitchen and dining room at one end. The fading light flooded in, casting a warm glow on the old Persian rug and the faded velvet sofas. Eddie hadn't exaggerated about the garden, it really was enormous, at least twice the size of the house. Around the walls grew espaliered fruit trees loaded down with crab apples and ripe pears. Marigolds, asters and dahlias filled the spacious borders that edged the well-kept lawn. Late roses tumbled from every spare bit of wall space and under an old copper beech stood a pretty summer house. Jude undid the bolt to the french windows in the lounge and the heavy lace curtains puffed up in the breeze, as if the house were easing itself into the garden. Leaving the doors open she went upstairs.

There was a large bedroom at the back, with a double bed set in the deep bay window overlooking the garden. The front bedroom was small with carved oak panelling and a tapestry bedspread. The bathroom was at the top of the stairs, in between the bedrooms. There wasn't a single doubt in her mind.

'Yes,' she said out loud to the house, then walked back to King's, deep in thought.

David was waiting for her.

'I heard your programme,' he said excitedly.

'What did you think?'

'Not bad. Bill Maxwell is the pick of the bunch when it comes to interviewing.'

'That's what Ward thinks too.'

She talked him through her whole day at work but never once mentioned the house in Maltings Lane.

The next morning she returned the key to Eddie and paid

her deposit. It was only at the end of the week that she told David she was moving out.

'Coming?' she asked.

He stared at her, panic rising in his eyes.

'Jude,' he pleaded. 'Just give me time.'

She smiled. The house answered a huge ache in her. She had space at last. Sadly David wouldn't be there to share it but after a summer of enforced proximity perhaps they'd both enjoy a period of solitude.

'I'll miss you,' she said, tears stinging her eyes.

He didn't answer, but buried his face in her long, golden hair.

She moved in at the weekend. Quietly, on her own, she stole out of King's the same way as she'd stolen in. Even Mr Greenhalgh didn't witness her passing, though he had offered her the use of his trolley the day before.

'Do it myself if I could,' he said, laying a hand tenderly on his back. 'Giving me gyp these days.'

Jude smiled and kissed him.

'I'll miss you,' she said.

'For the best, Jude,' he added philosophically.

'By the way, you know I've never been an Honourable?' He nodded. He wasn't the college mole for nothing.

'Little bugger, that Claudia,' he said, his face wreathed in smiles. 'Belter though,' he added affectionately.

David had offered to help her too but she'd insisted that she could manage on her own.

'It's only up the road,' she said dismissively.

She couldn't explain, not even to herself, why she wanted to make this move on her own. She was laying claim to more than a home. Somebody else's presence would mar the exchange between her and the house.

She waited until David had left left for the university library then stacked her belongings on to Mr Greenhalgh's trolley and rattled out of King's and along the Backs. The wet weather had given way to a blazing Indian summer and the sun beating

down through the avenue of old beeches gave no hint of the hard times to come. Jude smiled as she thought of the dahlias and marigolds that would be nodding in her garden – *her garden*! She quickened her pace, eager to get to the house. She turned the key in the lock then entered and stood with her back against the door. The house seemed to greet her – the creak of old wood, the smell of polish, the soft stir of lace curtains at the window. Leaving the unpacking till later she stepped out into the garden. The walls enclosed the heat and the perfume of ripe fruit and late roses. Jude picked the dead heads off the flowers then noticed a clump of weeds choking the roots of the apple tree. She spent most of the morning pottering in the garden then she heard the phone ring.

'Cambridge 62562,' she answered, hesitantly reading the numbers from the phone.

'Jude!'

'Claudia! How did you track me down?'

'Jude, I'm a researcher. You keep being surprised at how well I'm doing my job,' she teased. 'Anyway, you know that if all else fails there's always Mr Greenhalgh, who can find a camel in the middle of the night – for a price.'

'Did he tell you where I was?'

'Of course. Said, "She's just moved out," then went into a detailed description of his lumbago before he mentioned that David's still in King's. The bastard!'

'David or Mr Greenhalgh?'

'Bloody David! How could he do that to you?'

Jude was torn. She desperately wanted to talk to somebody about David's decision but Claudia was not the one.

'Give him time,' she answered philosophically. 'He'll come round to the idea, and the house is perfect.'

'Humphh,' Claudia grunted, not impressed.

'Claude, I completely screwed up,' Jude admitted. 'I thought he'd feel the same way as me and he didn't.'

'He's tied to King's by an umbilical cord. Somebody should chop it off and force him to eat it!' she exploded.

'He has to leave of his own accord. Now, come on, let's talk about something else - when're you coming to see me and my house?'

'Soon. Have you heard anything from the *Radio Times*?' They'd both sent off, as requested, a three-minute sample of their competition tapes, plus a thousand-word synopsis.

'No,' Jude answered. 'But it's early days yet.' Luckily, she thought. She'd got the unedited Venice tapes sitting at the back of her desk and hadn't had a moment to think of them.

'Do you want a hand with the editing?' Claudia asked.

'Oh, yes please.'

'How many are there?'

'Three,' Jude said awkwardly.

'That's enough material for *War and Peace*!' Claudia teased.

'I know. I couldn't bear to miss anybody out of the interview.'

'Book a studio and I'll come down next weekend.'

'Brilliant!'

No sooner had Jude put the phone down than it rang again. This time it was Eddie.

'Settled in?'

'Well, I've weeded the garden.'

'I'm at work if you get stuck and can't find the main drain, or some other vital bit of equipment.'

'Thanks, Eddie.' Then on impulse she added, 'Come and have dinner tonight?'

'Dinner? I'd love to.'

'Good, you'll be my first guest.'

Suddenly excited, like a child playing house, she unpacked her bags and hung up her clothes in the old-fashioned oak wardrobe. The view through her window enticed her on to the wide bed in the bay. She lay on it, flat on her stomach with her head on the pillows, so she could look over the window ledge and see her golden garden. Sighing with contentment, Jude closed her eyes and fell fast asleep.

When she woke up it was dark and there wasn't a thing to

eat in the house. Grabbing a wicker basket from the pantry she ran across the Backs into town. All the big shops had closed but the little delicatessen on the corner of Silver Street was still open. As she pushed open the door her nostrils were assailed with the combined smells of ground coffee, French cheese and Italian salami. Having not eaten a thing since breakfast she suddenly realised she was starving and quickly filled her basket with pasta, baguettes, cheese, red wine, coffee, ham and peaches. It cost a fortune but she comforted herself with the knowledge that she was now a working girl. She ran back home and had just enough time to light a fire and set the table before Eddie turned up with a bunch of roses.

Two in the kitchen was a crowd so Eddie went into the dining room and lit the candles. When she walked in with their pasta the room looked perfect with a crackling fire and candles flickering on the polished walnut table.

'Thank you, Eddie,' she said, kissing him lightly on the cheek. 'I can't tell you how happy I am here.'

He smiled. 'My pleasure. The house likes you.'

Loving the house as she did, she took him seriously.

'How do you know?'

'It feels good.'

Jude poured out the wine.

'To your mother,' she said. 'Thank her from me.'

Eddie toasted the air.

'Cheers, Ma, enjoy your new lover.'

He smiled at Jude's astonished expression.

'She's run off to Antigua – her boyfriend runs a flash hotel out there. Hopefully he'll keep her happy for a year or two.'

'Good. I'm in no hurry for her to come back. Let's eat.'

They sat for hours, drinking and talking shop. Eddie was a goldmine of gossip, especially on the Station Manager's affairs.

'Ward's blatant about who he's screwing. The only time he's discreet is when he's bringing one liaison to an end and starting up another. Mind you,' he said, thoughtfully sipping his wine, 'he has been known to have two mistresses going simultaneously.'

'Are they all employees?'

'No, he spreads it around. We're running a book on who the next lucky bimbo will be.'

'You can count me out!'

'You're as safe as houses. Ward wouldn't put a foot wrong with Bill Maxwell's brainy new researcher,' Eddie teased.

'He won't get the chance.'

'No, really. Ward rates Bill. He's the "intellect" on board.' Eddie winked as he mimicked Ward's silly nautical phrases. 'Tim's whacky, a man of the people, can talk to anybody about anything. Good for the early-morning slot. Maggie's intense and radical, answers the feminist lobby. Bill's afternoon show is solid interviewing. He's bright and far too good for Radio Cambridgeshire. Ward knows that and sucks up to him. Then there's Sukie . . .' he finished with a smile.

'How does Ward get rid of all his unwanted lovers? Does he fire them?'

'No, he just doesn't renew their contracts.'

'I can't believe he gets away with it,' she gasped.

'He doesn't quite. There's always Maggie snapping at his heels.'

'Poor woman. Was she ever his lover?'

'No way. He tried it once and she reported him to head office.'

'Good for her.'

'Not really. Ward got his own back by completely screwing up all her career moves.'

'What a pig he is.'

'Don't worry, Jude. He fancies you but he's intimidated by your brains,' laughed Eddie.

She brewed some coffee and they sat drinking it, sprawled

out on the old sofas listening to 'forties jazz records. Suddenly there was a knock at the door.

'Maybe it's a friend of your mother's?' said Jude. Eddie opened the door and Jude heard David's voice.

'I'm sorry to trouble you but is Jude here?'

She jumped up, suddenly embarrassed by the empty bottles on the table.

'Sure, come in,' said Eddie.

David walked in and quickly crossed the room to her.

'Forgive me?' he whispered in her ear as he held her tight. Jude clung on to him, her eyes brimming with tears.

'Time to go,' said Eddie good-naturedly.

'I'm sorry, Eddie, this is David.'

'Hi.'

The two men shook hands.

'We're going to be living here,' David said.

Stunned, Jude gripped his arm.

'Are we?'

He kissed her upturned face.

'Yes. We are.'

'Enjoy it,' said Eddie, taking his cue. 'See you on Monday, Jude.' After he'd gone they sat by the fire and stared into the embers.

'What made you change your mind?'

'You.'

She looked at him. 'It was a battle, wasn't it?'

He nodded. 'But you won, my love.'

She rested her head against his knees. 'I wonder if I always will?'

He kissed her fiercely on the mouth. 'Where's the bloody bedroom?'

Lying in bed with the window open and the moon high over her garden Jude sighed with happiness.

'Darling!' murmured David, kissing her breasts.

'More,' she murmured, arching her legs to meet his

searching mouth. His tongue found her and Jude grew wild under its flickering pressure. She rose and fell to the secret rhythms of her body, lost in a dark dance of pleasure. Just as the wave broke, in a long, slow roll of ecstasy, David quickly entered her, moving with her as she came in a soft, shuddering sigh.

'David . . . my love.'

They lay bathed in moonlight, smiling at each other.

'We're getting good at this,' he murmured.

'Very good.'

They spent the rest of the weekend alone, making love. In the kitchen, the bathroom, on the stairs, even in the garden as Jude was weeding the flower bed. When the alarm went off on Monday morning she could hardly open her eyes.

'I could stay here all day,' she mumbled, rolling over into his arms.

'Come on, it's gone eight.'

He got up and made coffee.

'Kiss me,' she said, as she perched on her bike.

'I love you. Have a nice day!'

Every phone was ringing when she walked into the office.

'Jude, for you,' called Jo.

'Hello, Jude Summers speaking.'

'Got you, at last.'

She felt like pointing out it was only nine o'clock on a Monday morning but what came next took her breath away.

'Mark Holden here, from the *Radio Times*.'

Jude's heart skipped several major beats.

'Yes?'

'We liked your sample tape on Venice. Can we have the complete piece?'

Jude thought of the three unedited tapes sitting at the back of her office drawer.

'Yes,' she said, sinking into the nearest chair, her legs suddenly gone to jelly. 'When?'

'End of the week. Pop it into the internal post, it'll get to us sooner.'

There was no way she was going to tell Mr Holden from the *Radio Times* that she wasn't even sure how to edit.

'You're shortlisted so it's fairly urgent, Miss Summers.'

'Right, no problem,' she lied.

'We're interviewing the final six at Broadcasting House next Tuesday. Can you make lunch?'

'Fine,' she lied again, and put the phone down before she dropped it.

'Bad news, love?' asked Jo.

'No, brilliant. I've been shortlisted for the *Radio Times* award!'

'Bloody hell!' laughed Jo. 'You've only been here a week.'

'I did it in Venice.'

'Christ, talk about a working holiday,' snorted Brian from behind the *Racing Times*.

Jude smiled. 'I must phone Claudia.'

There wasn't a moment all day. She had a new promotion tape to make for a gardening competition they were running the next week, Bill's embryo tape to edit, letters to write and two guests to book in.

'Done the music?' Bill checked.

She hadn't. She dashed into the studio with minutes to spare and grabbed a CD of Northern brass bands.

'That won't do for the National Trust,' said Bill. 'Something light and classical. Elgar'll do.'

She found the 'Dream of Gerontius' then ushered in the first guest, Lady Araminta DeFreville from the National Trust.

'Love, get me a Coke and my notes for the second guest, I left them on my desk,' Bill whispered as his opening music started up.

Running upstairs to the office she wondered if he ever stopped to eat.

'Claudia's on the phone,' called Jo as she walked in.

'Thanks,' said Jude, picking up her phone. 'Claudia, have you heard?'

'Yes. You?'

'Yeah!'

They both burst out laughing.

'We could split the prize money,' suggested Claudia.

'There'll be no winnings for me,' groaned Jude. 'I've got to edit the whole lot by Friday.'

'I said I'd come down and help, and I will.'

'How, Claude? You're working too.'

'I reckon I can swing a day off. I'll come down tomorrow night, after work. Just make sure we've got lots and lots of studio time. 'Bye.'

Jude saw Bill's studio light flashing on the wall.

''Bye, Claude, see you tomorrow.'

Later that evening Bill spent an hour teaching Jude how to work the computerised control panel. It was immensely complicated and took every ounce of her concentration.

'You're not going to learn it all in one go. It takes weeks, months even. But it will come with practice.'

Faced with an incomprehensible array of computer switches and dials, Jude didn't share his confidence.

'I'm not very good at machines,' she said lamely.

'You've got to be in this business. Now, watch,' he said as he pulled a lever and pressed a few control buttons. 'We came off air at five and handed over to Eddie in the news room. These are the controls for the handover, listen.' They caught the end of the news bulletin then Bill opened up the mike so that he could talk to Sukie in Studio 2. There was silence, then heavy breathing followed by Ward saying, 'Suck my cock.'

'Ward's in there!' Jude squeaked.

'Fucking the presenter with a minute to go,' smiled Bill. 'A true professional on the job.'

It was only the opening music of her programme that forced Ward out of the studio, leaving Sukie seconds to grab her notes and splutter the introduction.

'Her days are numbered,' said Bill, grimacing with disgust as Sukie got the time wrong twice in six minutes. A hot, throbbing chart topper followed the weather report, giving Sukie just enough time to straighten her blouse and blow kisses to Ward, who still seemed mesmerised by her bobbing bosom as he gazed at her from the observation box.

'I've had enough of this for the day,' Bill said, closing down the panel. 'See you tomorrow, Jude. If you need me first thing, I'm at the family law courts.'

Her eyebrows shot up.

'Interviewing a judge,' he laughed.

She tidied up the studio and went upstairs to the office. 'Does Bill ever stop?' she asked Jo.

'No, never.'

Jude smiled. 'I like him,' she said.

Jo burst out laughing. 'Congratulations! You're the only person in the building who likes her boss.'

The next morning Jude asked if she could book one of the studios for that evening.

'What the fuck do you need five hours for?' snarled Maggie Menzies as Jude blocked in her hours on the studio wall chart.

'Editing.'

'Well, I didn't think it was a disco. *What* programme are you editing that requires so much valuable studio time?'

Jude opened her mouth to speak but the words didn't come.

'My programme,' Bill answered for her. 'Any problems, Maggie?'

She backed down immediately and left the room.

'Bitch!' hissed Jo.

Jude sighed with relief. 'Thanks, Bill. Perfect timing.'

'That's OK. Could I ask what you're doing?'

'Editing a tape.'

'Who for?'

'Me, for a competition,' she added reluctantly.

'Yes?' he asked, wanting to hear more.

'I've been shortlisted for the *Radio Times* competition.'

'Jude! Well done!'

'It would be if I'd finished the final tape.'

'Can I help?'

'Yes,' she said, throwing caution to the wind. 'When I've finished editing it, will you give me your totally honest opinion?'

'Sure. Is that all?'

'Could I have Tuesday off?'

He took a while to answer. 'Yeah, as long as you pre-record a programme for me over the weekend.'

'It's a deal. Where?'

'Grunty Fen, the Antiques Roadshow.'

Jude burst out laughing. 'Can't wait!'

Claudia turned up at eight-thirty in the evening and they set to work. Listening to all of the tapes took over two hours but Claudia had the most astonishing memory. Generally they agreed on the overall content though there were some sections Jude was keen to chuck.

'You can't lose that sequence in the fish market,' insisted Claudia.

'But it's nothing to do with the Palazzo Giardino or Samson's.'

'Bugger that, it's everything to do with Venice.'

She played back the calls of the fish vendors overlaid by the bells ringing around the city.

'Jude, it's wonderful, and perfectly recorded too.'

Torn between arguing and feeling pleased with herself, Jude gave in.

'Is the interview between Arturo and Gabriele clear?'

'Yes, though there's a lot of atmosphere behind Gabriele.' They listened to him speaking over the steady tap of the workmen's chisels. Claudia nodded as she checked the levels on the editing machine.

'It'll be OK,' she said.

'And the gondola, out on the lagoon, isn't the water too choppy?'

'No, it's brilliant. Jude, stop fretting, you've got a masterpiece here. Enjoy it.'

Before the pub closed they dashed in for lasagne and chips.

'No booze for me,' said Claudia. 'I don't want to go berserk with the editing knife.'

Over their meal they talked about David.

'So, he's moved in?' asked Claudia.

Jude nodded. 'It was a big decision for him.'

'Big decision – you or King's? Come on, Jude!'

'Claude, I can't be straight with you about David if all you ever do is scoff. Anyway, you put up with a lot of shit from Jonathan.'

'There's a big difference, Jude. Jonathan gives me no hope of a future, never has. I take what he gives. You can damn me as a feminist, but there are no illusions in our relationship.' She sipped her Coke. 'Occasionally I wish there were.'

Jude was quiet. She didn't want to hear what Claudia had to say. The last few weeks had been like a honeymoon. With the start of a new term looming she knew it was coming to an end, and didn't need Claudia to ruin the little romantic time left to them.

'David wants a life with you and a future,' Claudia continued. 'Did he *really* expect you to live in King's just so that he wouldn't have to let go of the academic strings?'

'Claude, he's moved in. Doesn't that speak for itself?'

'Let's hope he can dump all his hangups and enjoy it.'

'He is, I'm sure of it,' Jude answered with a knowing smile.

They finished editing around two-thirty in the morning.

'Are you too tired to hear it through?' Jude asked.

'Not at all. Roll it for the last time.'

Half-asleep in the semi-darkness of the studio, Jude listened to the final edited tape, to Gabriele and Arturo, to Susie and

Mr Brownjohn, and her heart ached for the city she'd grown to love so deeply.

'Have I done them justice?' she asked, nervously.

'You've done more than that,' Claudia said with a smile. 'It's a brilliant piece of work. You'll win.'

'I don't want to win, I want us *both* to win. Come on, Claude, let's hear yours.'

'I thought you'd never ask!' laughed Claudia, pulling a tape from her bag. 'Now I want your absolutely honest opinion . . .'

She played her piece and Jude sat bolt upright, wide awake. It couldn't have been more different from her own: punchy, hard-hitting and impeccably constructed, Claudia's tape was entitled 'Political Madness'. Taking the government's health cuts as her starting point she'd somehow managed to track down a number of mentally ill adults and teenagers living in cardboard boxes on the Embankment. It was a harrowing documentary, vividly counterpointing government statistics with the hideous reality of life for the homeless. The tape finished with an old woman singing a child's lullaby

'That's Ruth. She was institutionalised thirty years ago,' Claudia explained when the singing came to an end. 'The local council closed down the hospital where she'd lived for most of her life and she just slipped through the net. Disappeared. Now she lives on the Embankment, with tramps, the homeless, the addicts and the alcoholics. She has a mental age of six and a half.'

Jude was close to tears.

'It must win, Claude.'

'It won't. Too hot, but worthy,' she laughed. 'Come on, cook me breakfast and I'll go back to London.'

She caught the first train back as dawn broke.

'Thank you!' yelled Jude as the train pulled out.

'Good luck!' Claudia called back.

Jude wandered back to the office, yawning her head off. How would she ever get through the day? Fortunately there

wasn't a spare moment – the phone rang non-stop, there were several meetings to sit through, then Bill's programme, which included a flying visit from John Major while he was visiting his home constituency of Huntingdon. At the very end of the day when she could hardly keep her eyes open, Bill said, 'OK, Jude, roll it.'

She looked blank. 'What?'

'Your competition tape.'

She set up the machine and Bill put his headphones on. Without moving or talking he listened intently to the hour-long tape. Jude sat behind him, pretending to work on his mail. All the while she was going through the piece in her head. As it swished off the reels Bill put down the headphones, turned his swivel chair round and stared at her.

'Well?' she stammered.

'Jude, you have been pissing me about!'

'I . . . what?'

'You never told me you could present or write a script so excellently. The editing was good too,' he added as an afterthought.

'I take no credit for that,' she admitted.

'Nevertheless, it's pretty damn' good, Jude.'

She jumped to her feet, delighted. 'You really liked it?'

'I think it's a winner.'

'Good. I'll send it off tonight.'

'And tomorrow you start doing the same thing for me, right?'

'You're sending me to Venice?' she joked.

'No, Grunty Fen Roadshow, and you bloody well edit it too!'

When she got home David had made supper. They sat in front of the fire with a bottle of wine, Jude half-asleep, listening to the spurt and hiss of the burning logs.

'Oh, David,' she sighed. 'I love this house.'

'Me too.'

She stared up at him and smiled.

'Thank you.'

'For what, love?'

'Making it home.'

David fondled her mass of flaming gold hair, lifting it up to kiss the soft nape of her neck. She sighed under his searching mouth.

'Jude,' he said, and paused uncertainly.

'Mmmmm?'

'Do you think we'll ever have children?'

She sat perfectly still, stunned by his question.

'David, I've never really thought about children.'

It was true, she hadn't. They were there all right, somewhere on the edge of her thoughts, but never fully imagined. She had a life to lead, a career to forge, a world to explore. After a flawed start she'd been fortunate enough to find herself a good lover, and now a lovely home. Put the two together, and did it inevitably make children? David laughed at her dazed expression.

'I didn't mean right now, just sometime. It would be good for us to have our own family.'

'Yes,' she agreed. 'One day.'

'Leaving King's and moving in with you has made me realise there's a whole world of possibilities open to us, Jude. We could share a life together, have children, grow old,' he teased.

Turning in his arms, she kissed him.

'I think I'd prefer to concentrate on the honeymoon right now.'

The truth was the honeymoon was over.

With the onset of a damp fen winter romance faded. Their love and mutual need was still there, as was their easy companionship, but as work claimed more of their time Jude and David had less and less to give to each other.

Jude was immediately immersed in preparing for her *Radio Times* interview at Broadcasting House. It was a great relief

knowing the tape was gone, but now she needed to get her head round all the background material. She phoned Gabriele in Venice several times, checking various facts and figures as she worked out exactly how she was going to sell herself and her piece to the selection panel.

When Tuesday came she was very calm. Even Claudia was surprised at how composed Jude was when they met up in the foyer of Broadcasting House.

'Aren't you nervous?' she asked.

'Not at all,' Jude answered. 'A day off in London, with you, chatting about Venice. Easy life!' she joked.

Mark Holden from the *Radio Times* was waiting for the six finalists.

'Good to meet you, Jude, Claudia,' he said, shaking hands. 'Glad you could both make it.' Smiling, urbane and relaxed, he welcomed them all then took them in the lift to the top floor restaurant where the other three members of the selection committee awaited them. Over vegetarian quiche and bottles of mineral water the ten of them chatted easily and informally.

'This is all very laid back,' Claudia said in the ladies' toilets. 'When do we get to the nitty-gritty. Like who's the front-runner for the grand?'

Washing her hands, Jude laughed.

'I reckon it's the keen Mr Hydes from Radio Blackburn.'

'What about the Radio Merseyside woman. She's very politically correct.'

'Come on, Claude, there's no piece more politically correct than yours,' Jude said.

'Absolutely, but it won't win. I keep telling you why, it's too fucking loaded.'

'And mine's too glamorous by half,' Jude added. 'I have a feeling that Mr Hydes from Blackburn has the right local image.'

'The rise of the Co-operative movement? Give me a break.'

'It's good and solid.'

Claudia snorted dismissively.

'So's cold porridge!'

'It's him or the Merseyside AIDS piece.'

'OK, let's take a bet on it,' said Claude, briskly brushing her silver-blonde hair. 'A tenner to you if Hydes from Blackburn wins, a bottle of champagne to me if you win.'

Jude burst out laughing. 'That doesn't seem fair.'

'You won't say that if you win.'

They had coffee in the executive suite on a lower floor. It was only then that the judges talked to each candidate in private and Jude was glad she'd been so thorough in doing her homework. There was general interest in the Samson's connection with the Peril San Marco funding, but what really excited the judges were all the specialist restoration details. Taking Palazzo Giardino as an example Jude was able to explain, in fine detail, how the money was spent. She had no idea until she stopped talking that she'd bent the judges' ears for nearly three-quarters of an hour. They'd been enthralled by her description of all the Venetian artisans, the hazards of rebuilding on rotting wood piles, the dangers, the expense of reproducing exactly the right colour for a cracked mosaic fresco, the gilding of rafters in the piano nobile, the resetting and carving of a fractured marble balcony. Suddenly she caught sight of the wall clock and stopped short.

'I'm so sorry,' she said. 'I got completely carried away.'

'So did we,' said Mark Holden.

Convinced he was just being polite, Jude hurried off and joined Claudia by the coffee table.

'You had them by the balls then,' she muttered.

'I got carried away and nobody stopped me. They must have been bored sideways.'

'No way, Jude. I was watching them. They were rivetted.'

Jude gave her a nudge. 'Get over there and strut your stuff, girl.'

'I will,' Claudia promised. 'I just don't want to knock Mr Hydes from Radio Blackburn off his perch.'

By four it was all over. Out in Portland Place Jude and Claudia hugged each other goodbye.

'Got to dash. Melvyn's interviewing Le Carré first thing in the morning, down in Cornwall. I've got to take the overnight train to Penzance and mug up on the script.'

'Sounds brilliant.'

'What're you up to, Jude?'

'War Brides in East Anglia,' she answered with a laugh.

'And David?' Claudia asked.

'Waiting to hear about the junior fellowship at King's.'

'A tenner he'll get it.'

Jude laughed at yet another bet being laid by Claudia.

'He'll be suicidal if he doesn't.'

David had been told by those rooting for him at King's that if he could get a book commissioned, based on his thesis, he'd be the front runner for the fellowship. OUP had expressed a definite interest in publishing an adaptation, something along the lines of a middlebrow read on English writers in Venice. The publishers had asked for a complete synopsis and at least five chapters by November so David was working like a man possessed. From the minute he got up in the morning to the moment he went to bed, he was totally, obsessively concentrated on the book. He hardly looked up from his computer when Jude bounced in, full of news from her exciting day at Broadcasting House.

'Oh, David, it was such fun! Claude and I had such a laugh She's been laying bets all afternoon . . .' Suddenly she stopped short. 'Aren't you interested?'

He nodded curtly.

'Yes, yes.'

But he still didn't look up.

'Sorry I bothered coming home,' Jude snapped, and walked

out into her garden that always held a welcome for her. Ten minutes later he joined her.

'Sorry, love,' he said, laying his head against her shoulder. 'I've been going crazy all day trying to finish that fucking synopsis.'

She kissed his blond head and smoothed his brow. 'Sorry too,' she murmured. 'I was a bit high and full of myself.'

'So you should be,' he cried. 'You're going to win this competition and be rich and famous.'

He hugged her tight and she laughed, but the moment had passed and she hadn't shared it with him.

Stressed and preoccupied, they argued a lot, particularly over the domestic trivia of their shared living.

'For Christ's sake, Jude,' he yelled one morning from the bathroom. 'There's no toothpaste or shampoo.'

She was downstairs, searching for coffee that he'd forgotten to buy.

'Don't talk to me like that,' she yelled back. 'I'm not the housekeeper!'

David walked into the kitchen, his hair dripping wet.

'Neither am I,' he snapped.

'Fine. Then how about a few basic house rules, seeing as I'm paying the rent round here?'

The words were out of her mouth before she could stop herself. David glared at her then walked back to the bathroom and slammed the door.

All day Jude felt guilty about her outburst. On the way home from work she bought flowers for him, coffee, shampoo *and* toothpaste. When she walked into the house the first things she saw on the hall table were flowers for her, with a note, plus coffee, shampoo *and* toothpaste. Laughing and crying, she ran into the kitchen where David was cooking supper and threw her arms around his neck.

'Darling, I'm so sorry,' she said, kissing his mouth and ears and neck.

'Me too,' he said, dropping the wooden spoon he'd been

cooking with and lifting her skirt to stroke her soft thighs. As they made their way, laughing, upstairs, Jude pointed to their identical shopping on the hall table.

'Great, we won't be arguing about toothpaste for another month.'

By the following month they were arguing about something else altogether.

War Brides, the six-part series she was scheduled to write and present in the spring, had been Jude's idea, triggered off by Nancy Desmond, a woman she'd recently interviewed in Peterborough. Nancy had met her handsome GI in 1943, fell pregnant and was married in 1944. By 1946 she was abandoned for the girl back home in Idaho and left to bring up twin daughters alone. Nancy's story turned out to be one shared by dozens. Abandoned or divorced GI brides were dotted all over the county; some had even left their husbands in the States and returned to England with the kids. Jude had talked it through with Ward who went for it. Rearranging his programmes for the early part of the following year, he slotted the series in to coincide with a war-time anniversary celebration at Duxford airport.

'It's all yours now,' he said, rubbing his hands in glee. 'HRH Prince Andrew will be at Duxford for the anniversary celebrations. We'll start your series that evening, with a bit of a flourish, and run it for six weeks. Well done, Jude. Nice piece of programme planning.'

She smiled bleakly, wishing she'd got more to show than a programme outline and a pilot interview.

With Bill's programme to put out five days a week she was left with only the weekends to research her GI brides series.

'I'm knackered,' she grumbled to Claudia.

'That's local radio for you. You have a brilliant idea, suggest it to the boss – who then lands you with making the bloody thing singlehanded.'

'Exploited or not, I love it.'

'Sucker,' laughed Claudia.

At first Jude felt guilty, sneaking off to do her interviews on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, but then she realised David barely noticed. By Christmas they'd both got into neglectful habits; eating meals on the run, going to bed and getting up at different times. In fact, the longest time they spent together was lying beside each other in bed, too exhausted even to think about sex. Occasionally they made love, but it was always short and not very sweet.

Just before Christmas Jude got the phone call she'd been dreaming about.

'Holden here, from the *Radio Times*.'

Jude smothered a gasp and held the phone so tight her knuckles turned white.

'Yes?' She realised her voice was wobbling.

'I won't beat about the bush,' said Holden. 'You've won!'

Jude dropped the phone and leapt two feet in the air.

'Yeah! I've won!'

Smiling with delight Jo picked up the abandoned phone and said, 'Better find out what else he's got to say.'

Too happy to be embarrassed Jude took the proffered phone and beamed into the receiver.

'Thank you, I'm so pleased.'

'We were impressed,' Holden continued smoothly. 'Good quality listening. Bringing in Samson's was a stroke of genius.'

'That was easy. They've been supporting Peril San Marco for years.'

'Maybe, but you picked up on it and linked it neatly to your average shopper. It slaps everybody on the back, gives credit where it's due. Nice work.' He cleared his throat and got down to business. 'We'll be holding a celebratory dinner, to present the award. And the cheque of course.'

'May Gabriele come,' she asked, 'and Mr Brownjohn – and Susie too? They all helped me make the programme.'

'You can have as many guests as you see fit, Ms Summers, within moderation and as long as they pay their own expenses,' he added, a bureaucrat to the bone. 'The ceremony will be held at The Grosvenor. We'll let you have more details in the New Year.' Jude suddenly wondered what had happened to Claudia's entry.

'Are there any other prize winners?'

'Yes. A Mr Adam Hydes from Radio Blackburn gets the second prize and a Ms Langham wins third.'

'Third! I don't believe it.'

'You know the piece?'

'Yes. It's brilliant.'

'Too brilliant,' he said, and that was that.

Later in the day, when some of her bubbling euphoria had worn off, Jude phoned Claudia.

'I'm sorry,' she said without preamble. 'You deserve better.'

'No more than you, Jude,' said Claudia, generous to the end. 'Now, come on, this isn't a back-slapping routine, this is party time. What're you going to do with the money?'

'Buy you a case of champagne and give the rest to Gabriele for the appeal fund.'

'Jude, treat yourself.'

'OK, I'll buy myself a Christmas present.'

But she never had time to buy the present. Christmas came and went in a rush of Jingle Bells and Carols from King's. Jude attended the service but not with David, as they'd planned. She presented it live from the Chapel on Christmas Eve. Bill had fallen ill with laryngitis and Ward asked her to take over. In his office she'd readily agreed; once outside she'd completely freaked out.

'Come on,' said Jo, raiding the boss's cupboards for a bottle of gin. 'You researched it and wrote it, now all you've got to do is present it!' She handed Jude a double gin. 'Easy.'

It hadn't been easy but it had been wonderful. A fitting ending to a momentous year. After the service Jude had hurried back to Maltings Lane and packed. She was going home to Watendlath, while David was spending Christmas with his mother in Worthing.

'Merry Christmas,' he said, slipping a parcel into her case 'Open it on Christmas Day.'

'This is for you,' she said, giving him a huge box tied with tinsel.

They stared at each other, tears clouding their eyes.

'I'll miss you, Jude,' he whispered.

She flung her arms about his neck and held on to him 'Merry Christmas, darling.'

He waved to her as she drove off through the night. The fog that had blocked the A1 for miles lifted as she drove west, as did her heart when she reached Keswick and threaded through the dark Borrowdale valley. Watendlath was perfect, like a scene from a Christmas card, with the tarn sparkling under a frosty full moon. Jude smiled at the fells. She knew each by name, like favourite friends. Oh, it was so good to be home.

Her mother was waiting up for her, dozing on the sofa, with a log fire crackling in the grate. They hadn't seen each other for a year and had lots to talk about over a huge pot of tea. When her brother, Dan, got up in the dark just before dawn, to check the cattle, Jude lay in her childhood bed, sleeping the sweetest sleep she'd had in months.

Chapter Seven

New Year came in with a whoosh. The *Radio Times* Competition results were announced and suddenly Jude was a celebrity. She was interviewed by network and local TV, photographed by a couple of magazines, and both the *Guardian* and *Cosmopolitan* ran nice pieces on her. Even Bill interviewed her.

'This is ridiculous – I *work* for you.'

'I'm honoured to know you, Jude,' he answered with a mock bow. 'Especially as I'm shortly to be losing you.'

'Losing me? What're you talking about?'

'Ward's sending you off to London on a three-month training scheme.'

'But I haven't even been here three months yet!'

'Winning that award has made you the station's golden girl. He's keen to show off his talented staff, the bastard!'

'What about my GI brides?'

'Fuck the brides! What about me?'

She opened her mouth to speak.

'Shhh!' He nodded at the red on-air light. 'Later.'

It was an exciting time for Jude, particularly knowing that everybody who had helped her make the programme would be at The Grosvenor for the award ceremony. David put a big ring around 13 January and counted down the days.

'Pity Arturo won't be there,' said Jude.

'He couldn't cope with London,' laughed David. 'Not enough water. Lucky Beata's loaded or you wouldn't have Gabriele either. She's paid for their air tickets, you know.'

'How kind of her,' Jude answered, touched by her friend's

support and generosity. 'I want Gabriele to pick up the award with me.'

'Forget it.'

'But he helped me win it,' she insisted. 'I would never have thought of doing it without him.'

'Jude, see it as a three-way split. He's got maximum publicity for Peril San Marco, Samson's have lots of happy customers, and you've won a grand. Everybody's happy.'

'What about Claudia? It was she who put me up to it – '

'For crying out loud, stop worrying! This is supposed to be fun!'

The evening turned out to be much more of a big deal than Holden had originally made out. As Jude walked into The Grosvenor she thanked her lucky stars that she'd invested in a sizzling black silk evening dress from South Molton Street. It had cost her entire salary for January but she felt wonderful in it. The black silk offset her creamy skin and the smouldering blaze of her hair. Her only jewellery was a pair of long diamante earrings from Butler and Wilson.

'You look fantastic,' whispered Claudia as they stood in a richly carpeted foyer, fragrant with lilies in vases almost as tall as Jude. Drenched in the perfume of hot-house flowers Jude shook hands with BBC officials. Cameras flashed and whizzed as she smiled and chatted, guided down the line of executives by Mark Holden who looked smoother than ever in his impeccable dinner jacket.

This was certainly a coup for Holden, recently appointed managing director to the *Radio Times*. He'd been head-hunted for the job, essentially to promote sales, but also had an interest in promoting relations between the magazine and programme creators. This successful award ceremony was a glittering platform for a lot of hard work and even more hard talking. He wanted his magazine to have glitzy links with actors, sports celebrities, stars from Light Entertainment, directors, photographers and producers. This fairly modest

competition was the first one he'd floated and it was looking so good more would certainly follow. The big boys in executive had dragged their feet to start with. They'd enough on their plates, with audience ratings and the licence fee, to worry about competitions. Holden had promised them a hassle-free ride, so long as they turned up for the champagne and speeches and here they were, looking tired and grey, but definitely impressed. Who wouldn't be? Jude Summers was a cracker. Bright, beautiful and immensely talented, with a dazzling idea that everybody loved Hyde from Blackburn had been a pain in the arse, pedantic and traditional, but his piece had its place. Claudia Langham was dynamite. Her tape was outstanding, politically red-hot, no way could it be placed first. She was a real pro, though, and like the others, would go far. It brought a gratified smile to Holden's face as he beamed his way down the executive line-up. The *Radio Times* would fuel these newcomers in their careers and he'd make sure his name was always associated with their success.

Leading Jude and the rest of the candidates into a small but lavish room, Holden conducted them to the top table where hovering waiters poured out champagne. Gabriele, Beata, Mr Brownjohn and Susie sprang to their feet as Jude and David joined them.

'*Cara!*'

'*Come vai?*'

'Jude, wow. You look a star,' Susie exclaimed.

'Well done,' said Mr Brownjohn, slightly overwhelmed by the razzamatazz.

Jude barely had time for half a glass of much needed champagne before Mr Holden started the ceremony.

'We at the BBC were delighted by the response of so many talented young newcomers. . .'

'I bet,' grunted Claudia.

'New blood pumps life into the industry – life which we at the front end sometimes lack.'

There was a sympathetic gurgle of laughter from the executives in grey suits on the front table.

'They're on 60k a year and complain of having no energy!' hissed Claudia.

'Do me a favour, Claude,' whispered Jude. 'Get me kicked out after the award ceremony, not before, please?'

Mercifully Holden moved from the BBC to Samson's, obviously pleasing Mr Brownjohn's guests on a nearby table.

'It is quite extraordinary that the winner of this award has drawn together such disparate groups – from the canals of Venice to a British household name, Samson's.'

There was an enthusiastic round of applause. 'I'd like to play a section of the winning piece,' continued Holden, nodding at a technician who ran Jude's tape.

The sound of lapping water filled the room and Arturo's voice, chatting to Jude in broken English as they skimmed over the lagoon to Palazzo Giardino. Somebody had done a clever bit of editing and the mood changed. Over the loud chiselling of the builders came Gabriele's voice, talking to Mr Brownjohn in the garden, giving him a lively run-down of the palace's long history. For Jude the memories were too intense. Tears sprang to her eyes as Mr Holden broke through another round of applause and said, 'So it is with the greatest pleasure that I announce the winner of the *Radio Times* Newcomers' Award – Jude Summers.'

Prepared as she was, Jude's knees went weak as all eyes turned to her.

'Go on, darling,' whispered David, helping her up. Shaking all over, she made her way round the tables to the raised platform. Smiling faces turned to her as the applause grew louder and more excited. By the time she'd reached Holden, Jude was glad of his supporting arm to hold on to.

'Well done,' he said, beaming with pleasure as he handed her an enormously heavy trophy.

The applause turned to cheers from her table as another BBC official gave her the cheque for a thousand pounds. She

waited for a break in the clapping then said, 'This isn't just for me, it's also for Gabriele Girotto.' She pointed out Gabriele, on her table by the stage. 'It is his kind of unstinting devotion that is saving some of the finest pieces of architecture in the world. Venetian treasures would have been lost forever were it not for charities such as Peril San Marco. This money will help,' she held up the cheque, 'but he needs more – Venice needs more. Other companies must follow Samson's generous example otherwise the world will lose one of its pearls: La Serenissima – Venice.'

She stepped down quickly, worried she'd said too much, but the applause which followed her back to her seat proved otherwise.

Gabriele stood up to embrace her. '*Carissima, grazie tanto*. Thank you.'

Jude drank champagne and tried to calm her thudding heart. It was a relief to watch the next prize winner. Claudia was third to go up, blonde, leggy and sizzlingly confident. She took her cheque and turned to the audience.

'Whether the government likes it or not we have a responsibility to the sick in our society,' she started.

Holden looked distinctly uncomfortable. He didn't want to spoil the mood of the evening, not now when the big boys were looking so pleased with themselves. 'This money will go to the homeless wandering the streets of London.' She ended abruptly and stepped down.

Holden was surprised and relieved to see the executives clap enthusiastically. Claudia's entry had obviously added the right amount of political awareness to the evening. On that high note he briskly wrapped up the proceedings and everybody started to party. They ate and drank till gone midnight then went on to a nightclub in the West End where they danced till dawn.

'I'll know I'll pay for this,' murmured Jude as she fell into bed, 'but, oh, it's been worth it!'

* * *

Gabriele and Beata stayed with them in Cambridge for a few days. Jude managed to take time off work to be with them, but in fact spent most of it exploring Cambridge in the snow with Gabriele, while Beata and David worked in the university library on David's book, now commissioned and titled, *Venice and the English Romantics*.

'I've been here nearly six months and I haven't seen half the buildings you've found in the last twenty-four hours,' said Jude.

At supper they all met up and had a wonderful meal, a mixture of English and Italian, with lots of Veneto wine that Beata had brought from her father's rich cellars. Beata teased David about the light, chatty style of his middlebrow book.

'Piss off, Beata,' he said, throwing a bread roll across the table at her. 'That's exactly what the publishers asked for, an easy read.'

'It's certainly easy,' she laughed.

'I'm only writing the bloody thing to get the King's junior fellowship. They're certainly taking their time about it,' he added pensively.

'*Poverino*,' Beata soothed. 'You'll get it, no problem.'

David looked unconvinced. '*Magari*, Beata. *Magari*.'

Ironically it was while David was at home with Beata, and Jude was out with Gabriele, exploring the Leper Chapel on the frosty fen, that David heard he'd been given the fellowship. When Gabriele and Jude returned, red-faced with cold and very muddy, David and Beata were waiting for them with glasses of spicy mulled wine.

'I got it!' David cried, grabbing Jude round the waist and swinging her up in the air.

Jude came down, laughing and gasping for breath.

'When?'

'They phoned this morning, after the board meeting. I'm now Dr Osborne, Research Fellow, King's College, Cambridge!'

Jude laughed to see him so ecstatically happy.

'Well done, darling. I never doubted it for a minute.'

'I did,' he added. 'But no more worries. I've got my room back. I can supervise students and write and write and write – yeah!'

It was a night to remember, all of them happy and glowing with success. Jude was sad to see Gabriele and Beata leave.

'I'll miss you both so much,' she said, hugging each of them in turn.

'Promise you'll come to Venice soon?' Gabriele asked.

'I'll try,' she answered.

'I need you to help me spend the Samson's money,' he said with a smile.

Byzantine palaces were the last thing on Jude's mind when she met the GI brides, women now in their seventies with haunting stories of sad lives. The extreme weather conditions, snow up to two feet deep out on the fens, meant that Jude couldn't get back to Cambridge on a number of occasions. She had to stay overnight with her 'brides'. Their stories were poured out over cups of tea in front of glowing fires – tragic stories of bitter disillusion.

There was a lot of material to edit but Jude had a series in the can before she left for London.

'Excellent stuff,' Ward said. 'Marvellous.'

'Good,' she said, relieved.

'Local enough to hold 'em gobsmacked in Ely but definitely good enough for the network. We may have another winner here, Jude.'

'I hope so,' she murmured, edging towards the door.

'Don't get too successful,' he called after her, 'or telly will nab you!'

The trainees' course at Broadcasting House in Oxford Circus was a route march. Non-stop work: editing, recording, presenting, scripting, even mending the control panel in an emergency. It was total radio immersion but by the end

of it Jude felt she could deal with anything. In January she'd dithered when she had to operate the control desk alone. By the end of March she could have worked it single-handed with her eyes shut. When she returned to Radio Cambridgeshire in the spring she was a cool, slick professional.

'For crying out loud, Jude, you'll do me out of a job,' joked Bill the first day he walked into his studio and found it perfectly set up for his programme.

'Cop this,' she said as she played the new promotion cartridges she'd written and recorded that morning. They were sharp and stylish with good music and stunning sound effects.

'Now that's almost worth not seeing you for three months.' He smiled and briefly kissed the top of her head. 'Welcome back and allelujah! The temp they gave me was crap!'

It was wonderful to be back working in Cambridge. No more commuting, no dashing across London from one studio to another, no long training sessions or programmes to script and edit till three in the morning – just work. Keen to practise and improve her new skills, Jude worked long hours, usually ending up in the Flying Pig for a drink before she cycled home. Everybody was pleased to see her back, especially Ivan Ward who kept calling her into his office for long chats. His steaming affair with Sukie was over and Jo teased Jude relentlessly about being next on his hit list.

'Imagine screwing the boss,' she giggled.

Jude's stomach churned at just the thought.

'No way,' laughed Bill. 'Her tits aren't big enough.'

'Sexist pig!' snapped Jude, but nevertheless she was on her guard with Ward.

'Think carefully about what comes next,' Bill advised about a month after she'd been back in Cambridge. 'Ward's keen to push you. Be sure you choose where you want to go.'

'I just want to stay here for a while,' she answered.

'Thank God for that!'

* * *

As her career expanded and bloomed, Jude's home life wilted. She and David crossed like ships in the night: friendly ships if a little distant and withdrawn. It was King's Feast that finally blew it. He particularly wanted her to go so that she could meet a couple of his new colleagues from the English faculty.

'Their partners are nice too,' he added when she looked uncertain. 'It's not the usual stuffy lot of old farts on High Table.'

Over the last few months Jude had had a bellyful of self-obsessed dons who talked only about themselves *all night long*. Poor college food, even when combined with staggeringly good wines and excellent madeira, couldn't relieve or even dull the excruciating boredom. One of the worst, Dr Gurney of Applied Maths fame, always made a bee-line for Jude. Whenever they met, on average every three months, he'd sit very close to her, bad breath and all, and whisper, 'Now where were we, dear girl . . .?' as if time had stood still for three months. At King's Founder's Feast earlier on in the year she'd had her ear bent on Applied Maths for two and a half hours. The next time Jude had the misfortune to be placed next to him and he opened with the usual, 'Now where were we, dear girl . . .?' She rose to her feet and said, with icy politeness, 'I've no idea where you were, Dr Gurney, and I'm certainly not going to sit here for three hours helping you find out!'

David knew she found High Table boring and didn't normally ask her these days, but this night, he insisted, would be different.

'Anyway, you haven't been into King's for months. Can't you, just for once, cancel the bloody studio?'

Jude felt guilty. She knew she ought to show willing but the only available studio slot coincided with High Table supper.

'David, it's the only time I can get and I have to edit this interview by Friday.'

'Oh, for crying out loud!' he yelled, and quite uncharacteristically hurled a newspaper across the room.

'It is my job,' she reminded him.

'I know, I'm sorry,' he said, somewhat shamefaced.

'Could I come for the port and Stilton?' she asked.

'Anything,' he laughed, 'as long as you come!'

By working through her lunch breaks and staying on late at night Jude made the port and Stilton - and enjoyed it too. She met up with a few of their old friends and David introduced her to his new colleagues whom he clearly liked a lot. Jude thought them pleasant but staid, they didn't put a foot wrong all night . . . quite unlike Claude and Johnny who would have been pissed by ten and jumping into the fountain by midnight. Still, the company was easy and David was happy. The fact that she'd have to make up for lost time, and get up at four to have an hour in the studio before the breakfast programme started, she never even mentioned.

David was scheduled to spend the Easter vacation in Northern Italy, touring the main cities – Milan, Verona, Padua, Venice – giving talks to launch his book. It had been a mad rush to get it out but it was finished and had already received some excellent reviews in the Sunday papers. David had been massively relieved when the manuscript had finally gone off. His old easygoing smile returned as tension slipped away and he settled into his comfortable new life-style. He relished every moment of being King's golden boy.

'Darling, let's have a bit of time together before I leave for Italy?' he asked Jude one night. 'Even if it's only a long weekend, it'll do us both good.'

Jude agreed and they booked a cottage in Norfolk. It was wet and very windy but they didn't mind a bit. The cottage was small and cosy, looking out across the bleak grey marshes to the North Sea. They walked for miles along the empty beaches, buffeted by the wind and the rain, then came home

and lit a huge roaring fire. Slowly peace came back to them and they grew loving again.

'We mustn't get into the habit of living separate lives,' David said, as they lay on the sofa listening to the storm raging outside. 'It's really bad for us.'

Jude nodded, too contented to speak.

'No matter how busy we are, we must make time for each other,' he continued in earnest.

'Let's start right now,' she said, unbuttoning his shirt.

The fire played on their bodies as they tumbled off the sofa on to the hearth rug. With unexpected urgency they made love, as if they were frightened they'd lose what they'd found. It was all a bit too sudden for Jude but David stroked and kissed her until she cried out with pleasure then rolled into his arms, sighing with happiness.

'Love, I don't want to leave you,' he murmured, running his hand along the length of her back. She smiled into his face and kissed him.

'It's not for long.'

David left for Verona on Good Friday and Jude threw herself into work, determined to clear the decks before he came back. She'd resisted the temptation of going home to Watendlath for a few days. It would be lambing time on the farm and her family would be working around the clock. She'd more than enough to do at work, especially as she'd volunteered to work Good Friday and Easter Saturday.

Easter Sunday she had off and woke ridiculously early to riotous birdsong and sunshine streaming through her bedroom window. She made breakfast and ate it in the garden, under the apple tree. Blossom fell around her like a blessing and on an impulse Jude decided to go to King's Chapel for the Easter Morning Service. She changed into a summer dress and whimsically put on the Edwardian straw hat that Claudia had given her the year before. Leaving her hair loose around her shoulders she walked

along the Backs, feeling like something out of *Alice in Wonderland*.

The chapel was wonderfully cool, smelling of candle wax and polish. She chose a pew with a good view of the High Altar and the east window and settled back. The boy choristers' perfect voices pierced the stillness. Jude closed her eyes and sighed. This is heavenly, why don't I do it more often? she thought. Suddenly a voice hissed in her ear.

'Excuse me, ma'am, would you mind if I sat right here?'

Bloody, bloody Americans! fumed Jude as she inched up the pew.

'There are at least five hundred other places you could choose,' she snapped. 'Why you have to – ' She looked up to glare at the intruder and recognised him.

'*Jonathan*!' she stifled a cry of delight.

'Howdee, ma'am!'

'You bastard!'

'Shhhh!' hissed the furious verger.

Jude couldn't stop giggling.

'Let's get out of here before we're thrown out,' he said, steering her towards the door.

Outside, in the Great Quad, they embraced each other.

'Why do you keep doing this to me?' she laughed.

'What, surprising you? Why not?' he answered. 'You look wonderful, Jude.'

'So do you.'

They stared admiringly at each other. Jonathan, strong and tanned, oozing that particular confidence that living successfully in another country gives; and Jude, slim and fresh as a schoolgirl with her hair tumbling from underneath her hat.

'We can't go back in there,' she said as the choristers started to sing 'Jesus Christ is Risen Today'.

'Not unless you want arresting!'

She linked her arm through his. 'Come on, let's have coffee.' As they turned to walk along the side of the Gibbs Building, Jonathan froze in his tracks.

'For crying out loud, don't tell me you're still living in bloody King's?'

She didn't answer but led him past the Old Court, over King's bridge and along the Backs.

He smiled. 'Great, you have moved out?'

'You'll see.'

She stopped in Maltings Lane and pointed at her pretty cottage.

'This is where we live.'

'*We?* You mean you got David out of his ivory tower and into a regular house?'

She nodded smugly.

'Come on, I'll give you a guided tour.'

'Jude, this is perfect,' said Jonathan, gazing around the old walled garden in delight.

'I know,' she said with a dreamy smile. 'I love it.'

She left him wandering around, admiring the flower beds and the old trees. As she made coffee in the kitchen she watched him through the open window. He was so easy and relaxed, bending to sniff the flowers or rearrange a stray climber. His clothes suited him, casual but stylish: a cream suit worn with an open necked, deep blue shirt. His hair was longer than she remembered, emphasising his strong, clear face and intense dark eyes. He looked up and caught her staring at him. Completely unembarrassed, he met her gaze and smiled back.

'I never knew you liked gardens,' she called through the window.

'Love 'em. It's probably the only thing I miss about England.'

They had coffee in the garden, with the Easter bells ringing out all over the city.

'Well, if I wanted to come back to a dream of England, this has got to be it,' he said, lying on his back and staring up into the apple bough hazy with blossom.

'Talking of England, why are you here?'

'Picking up my doctorate.'

'For a man who hates Cambridge, you can't keep away.'

'If I hadn't met you I'd be on the train heading back to London, right now.'

From the look on his face she knew he meant it.

'Did you plan to arrive just as Claudia left for New York?' she teased.

'I got to see her before she went,' he answered with a smile. 'She tells me things are going well with you, Jude?'

Lying under the trees with the blossom falling all around them they talked the morning away then realised they were starving hungry.

'Let's cycle out of town,' he suggested. 'They do a good pub lunch at Madingly.'

It wasn't until they got to the pub that the first frisson, like a dark premonition, tingled through her body. In between bites of her chicken salad she was watching him closely as he talked excitedly about film school. Suddenly she stopped listening to him, mesmerised by the curve of his hand as he held his fork. His teeth were white and even as he bit into the food, his mouth soft and full. She shivered, as if woken from a trance.

'Jude, are you OK? You're as white as a sheet.'

'Yes,' she lied.

'No, you're not,' he said, quickly covering one of her hands with his. 'Are you sick or something?'

The feel of him sent a tremor like a shockwave through her system. She sprang to her feet.

'I think I've had too much sun,' she said, and dashed into the Ladies.

Once inside the cool tiled washroom Jude pressed her head against the mirror and stared at herself. What was she doing? She threw cold water on to her flushed face. Stupid! Stupid! Stupid! It had been exactly the same that evening, long ago, in Cesare's with Lucius. The same melting, aching need. But this was different. Jude stared into her own dilated eyes.

'This is your best friend's lover,' she whispered. 'Get a grip.' When she walked out of the Ladies' Jonathan was waiting with the bikes.

'Feeling better?'

She nodded but didn't dare look at him.

'Fancy a spin?'

'Yes.'

A cycle ride was just what she needed. Jumping on to her bike she belted on ahead of him, changing gears as she sprinted down leafy lanes studded with sweet violets and primroses. They shot through the villages to Grantchester where Jonathan suggested they stop for tea in the Orchard Tea Rooms. Jude shook her head.

'No, I really have got work to finish.'

He took her arm, stopping her excuses. 'Jude, what is the matter?'

Embarrassed, she shook her head.

'I know just the thing to cheer you up,' he said, pointing to the river. 'A swim.'

Normally she'd have been in like a flash but this time, hot and sweaty as she was, Jude held back. How could she trust herself? Jonathan had no such scruples. Leaning his bike against a tree, he stripped off to his boxer shorts and dived in from the bank.

'It's cold!' he shouted.

With his hair swept back from his face and water dripping down his broad shoulders he was even more desirable. What would happen if he touched her, even accidentally, playfully, under the water? Feeling even hotter, Jude turned to go but suddenly he grabbed her foot.

'Come on, don't be a spoilsport,' he laughed, sunlight dappling his smiling face.

Jude stared at him, then at the rippling cool water. Throwing off her dress, she jumped into the river and swam furiously up and down, frightening all the water fowl in sight. He was lying on the bank when she clambered out, his body

open to the sun, eyes closed, lashes dark and damp. Resisting the urge to lie down beside him, Jude pulled on her dress.

'I've got to dash, I've a studio booked at six.'

'Tonight? I was hoping to take you out to dinner.'

'No, I'm sorry. I must go.'

He dressed quickly and they cycled back to Cambridge. She was glad of her excuse to go to the radio station. It meant she could leave him to cycle into town without her.

'Can we meet up tomorrow?'

'I'm doing an outside broadcast from Peterborough, all day.'

'Evening?'

'I don't know when I'll be back.'

'OK.'

This time his answer was curt.

'Perhaps one day you'll tell me what went wrong,' he said quietly and cycled off alone.

She was out of the office all day Easter Monday, at Peterborough's Fun Day with Bill and Jo. When they got back it was gone seven and Bill nipped to the pub for a pint. Jude put away their equipment then went through the messages on her desk. Jonathan had phoned twice. She stared at the memos and wondered what to do. She'd had a restless night thinking about him and had finally decided, around dawn, that something inexplicable had triggered off violent memories of Lucius which she'd laid on Jonathan. She didn't want to risk seeing him again, just in case she started reacting badly. She'd write a letter of apology, that's what she'd do, and put it all down to stress.

She found Bill and Jo in the Flying Pig, deep in discussion with a man at the bar. As she walked towards them she realised, too late, that the man was Jonathan.

'Hi, Jude,' he said. 'Buy you a drink?'

Her jaw dropped.

'What's up?' joked Bill. 'Jonathan says you're old friends.'

She smiled, overbright with nerves. 'Yes, we are, it's just a surprise seeing him in here.'

'Well, make the most of him,' said Bill. 'He's just told me he's leaving tomorrow.'

Mercifully the food arrived and Bill turned his attention to gathering up knives and forks. Jonathan bought a round of drinks and they sat in the garden, talking about network radio in the States. Jude was quiet, occasionally glancing at Jonathan, wary of her own reaction. With relief she realised she was all right. After the kind of wild, lascivious thoughts she'd had about him on Easter Sunday, it would be difficult to look him in the eye for a while, but at least her limbs weren't turning to jelly every time he picked up his glass.

When it was closing time they walked back to Maltings Lane across the empty common. Direct as ever Jonathan asked, 'What happened yesterday?'

'Oh, nothing. Just work.'

'Shit. You'd got a bug right up your ass, Jude Summers, and it was something to do with *me*.'

'Forget it, Jonathan.'

He wouldn't.

'So what did I do?'

To avoid any further questions she hurried on ahead of him. When they got to Maltings Lane she put the key in the latch and turned to him. 'Good night,' she started to say, but never finished. Moonlight bathed his face, softening his lips, gilding his cheek-bones, intensifying the darkness of his eyes.

'Jude?' he whispered and her resolve crumbled like a dam before a tidal wave. All her resolutions were swept away by her clamouring need to touch him. For a second they both held back then they fell on each other. She was pressed up against him, pushing open his lips, kissing him hungrily as her hands fondled his hair, his neck, his throat. Kissing her with a passion that whipped her breath away, Jonathan lifted her into his arms and pushed open the door.

'Upstairs,' she murmured.

Holding her close, as if she was the most precious thing in his life, he carried her into the bedroom where the tempo changed from frantic to gentle. Jude's body was moving ahead of her thoughts, responding instinctively to the touch and smell of him. As she undressed him her heart lurched with excitement. The shape of his hips and thighs, the muscles across his belly, the line of his back – she had to have him.

'Jude! Jude, let me,' he said as she took off his clothes.

'No, me!' she answered fiercely. 'You're mine.'

She drew back the lace curtains so that the moon could light their love-making. As she turned to him, bathed in silver, he gasped, 'You are exquisite.'

He ran his hands through her hair, feeling for her breasts. When he found them, high and full, he stroked the nipples until they hardened under his hands. He reached down her hips and belly to the silk of her briefs.

'Take them off,' she gasped as she felt his searching fingers. Kissing her, licking her, stroking her, Jonathan sent Jude into a frenzy of desire. When his tongue dipped into the warmth of her thighs she turned around so that she could take him into her mouth. His hands grabbed her hips as she kissed his beautiful cock.

'Jude! Ah, Jude . . .'

When he'd reached the point of unbearable pleasure she turned and mounted him, thrusting on to him, deeper and deeper. There were no words, just a rolling place somewhere at the beginning of time. Locked into each other, they tought to keep the ecstasy – then it broke, like the tide turning. Jude threw back her head and cried out, as he did. Holding on to each other they plummeted through stars into crashing seas, then reverence silenced them.

Tears coursed down Jude's face as her body emptied of him. They held on to each other, without speaking, tracing the lines of the other's face, committing them to memory. It was Jude who broke the spell.

'What happened?' she whispered.

'I love you.'
'Why now?'
'I love you.'
'What will we do?'
'I love you.'
'I love you,' she echoed.

Like a song of joy they made love over and over again, claiming and reclaiming each other – then the dawn came. Before light there was a single bird call, then another and another as day broke to a riotous chorus of joy. Jonathan fell asleep with his head on her breast, his hand clasped in hers. Jude lay still, stroking his dark hair, staring at the rosy sky studded with cloud.

What have we done?

The sentence rolled around her head.

What have I done?

Disentangling herself from Jonathan she rose from the bed and pulled on some clothes and a pair of shoes. She crept downstairs, intending to make some tea, but instead she opened the front door and left the house. Once outside her destiny was sealed. On automatic pilot she walked quickly to work where the early morning news team let her in. Desperate to avoid conversation she hurried into the office kitchen and made coffee.

She drank the scalding coffee and stared out of the window. Slowly everything fell into place. She'd lied to herself from the start. Her reaction to Jonathan on Easter Sunday had nothing to do with Lucius or bad memories – she'd simply *wanted* him. Their union had been glorious, the best ever, burning out everything. She wanted him forever, but he wasn't hers to have. Setting down the cup, Jude's brain turned icy calm. She had to leave Cambridge, right now, and not come back until he'd gone. He'd told her he was getting a flight from Heathrow that night. He'd have to go back to his mother's in Chiswick to pick up his luggage then get to the airport for check in. She glanced at the kitchen clock: 6.45. He would have to

leave Cambridge by four that afternoon, at the very latest. Grabbing her things she knew exactly what to do – get the hell out for ten hours so that they absolutely couldn't meet.

She dashed off a note to Bill, apologising for her absence, and another to Jo saying if anybody called she'd taken the day off. She ran to the station and jumped on the 7.10 commuter train to Liverpool Street station. It broke down for half an hour at Tottenham Hale but Jude didn't care. She could have sat there all day for all it mattered to her. When she got to London it was 8.45 and pouring with rain. She walked down to the Thames and along the Embankment to the Tate. It opened at ten and she wandered through galleries until her vision blurred.

Checking her money, she calculated she'd enough money for coffee and a packet of biscuits in the restaurant. It was only in the afternoon, around four, that her resolved cracked. As she stared at Henry Wallis's 'The Death of Chatterton' and saw the perfect face of the dead man, the soft mouth, the dark curling hair and the closed, dreaming eyes, she recalled Jonathan. How she'd left him, bathed in the dawn light, abandoned to sleep, a smile playing at the corners of his mouth. Her heart contracted as she recalled the taste of him, his bruising kisses, the wash of his hands along her body, the sense of utter completion as he entered her. She made no attempt to hide her tears. They flowed unchecked down her cheeks until the attendant offered her his hankie.

She left London on the 6.35 and got back to Cambridge at 8. She couldn't go home, not yet. She walked to the office and found Bill still there. He took one look at her, white, wet and shivering, and without a word gathered her into his arms. She wept as he gently rocked her back and forth. After about five minutes he said, 'Jonathan?'

She looked surprised.

'How did you know?'

'It was written all over his face. Yours too.'

She looked at him, bewildered.

'What am I going to do?'

'I don't know, love.' He paused then added, 'He was here all morning. He left those.'

On Jude's desk lay a bouquet of limp spring flowers. She recognised the writing on the card. It read, 'I'll come back.' She quickly dropped the flowers and the card into the bin.

'I want to go home,' she said.

'I'll take you.'

Bill drove her back to Maltings Lane and opened the door for her.

'Try and rest, sweetheart.'

She needed to lie down, but not upstairs, not in that bed. Shivering with cold she built up a fire in the sitting room and settled down on the hearthrug with a blanket around her. Sleep was instant but there was no peace in it. She relived the night before over and over again. When she awoke it was to her own voice crying his name.

'Jonathan!'

Feeling like hell she got up, showered, dressed and forced food down her throat. When the telephone shrilled out she dropped a mug of coffee all over the kitchen floor. Terrified it would be Jonathan, she stared at the phone then grabbed it.

'Yes?' she almost shouted.

'Jude!'

For a minute she didn't recognise the voice.

'Jude?'

'David?'

'Remember me?'

Her throat was dry, her legs trembling, but she somehow managed to speak. 'How's it going?'

'Brilliant.'

She listened as he talked, hanging on his every word. It was another world, safer than hers, and she wanted to be there. When the pips went she almost wept.

'David! Don't go.'

The line went dead and she put the phone down. It rang again, immediately.

'David!' she cried.

'Jonathan. Jude, listen to me, please?'

'No.'

'I love you.'

'No!'

She slammed the phone down and left the house. As she cycled to work across the common she knew if she was to survive she would have to fill her days and nights with something. A nine to five job just wasn't enough. She needed a project, an epic, that would demand her total attention twenty-four hours a day – what? She felt her brain had turned to mush and she'd never have another good idea again. Jo confirmed her doubts.

'Fuck! You look like hell.'

Jude immersed herself in work, had all her meals in the Flying Pig and went home as late as possible every night. She kept the answerphone permanently on and wiped out all of Jonathan's messages. When his letter, posted in England, arrived she burnt it. After two days she forced herself to go into the bedroom and it was agony. With tears streaming down her face she pushed open the windows and threw all the bedding into the garden where she left it overnight. She still couldn't sleep in that room so she made up a camp bed in the sitting room and slept by the fire every night.

The week that followed was the worst of her life. It was not like the confused aftermath of Lucius, where she reeled from bewilderment to pain. This was pure self denial, an act of will. The man she wanted didn't belong to her; he belonged to another woman, her dearest friend whom she'd betrayed. One day she'd tell Claudia, maybe David too. For the moment her mind was set on purging Jonathan Raphael from her heart. Her decision to negate him took on the solemnity of a vow. She repeated, like a mantra: It was a mistake,

a sin, it will never, ever happen again. Words didn't touch her subconscious which was in screaming turmoil. All night she was racked by dreams of him, dreams so vivid she could smell him, feel him enter her, hear him cry out.

Work was her salvation. She threw herself into it, worrying Bill with her frenzy.

'Take it easy, sweetheart.'

'I can't,' she admitted. 'If I do, I'll go mad.'

When the idea for the new series came to her, it was so simple it was perfect.

'Christ, Jude. Not another university series?' groaned Ward.

'No, something totally new.'

'You just said Cambridge – '

'I said the secret side of the city, the unfamiliar, forgotten Cambridge off the tourist and the university track.'

'Like where?'

Remembering the places she and Gabriele had discovered, she ticked them off on her fingers.

'The Leper Chapel, Lammasland, Hobson's Conduit, Nine Wells, St Peter's church, Kettles Yard . . .'

'OK, OK,' he laughed. 'How will you string it into a series? It's all over the bloody place at the moment.'

Jude smiled. She'd won the first round.

'I'll have an outline on your desk by Monday.'

She worked like a demon all weekend, researching the venues and writing up the details for Ward's approval.

'Clever idea, links well,' he said as he worked through her programme outline. 'You've got the obvious historical stuff, some nice environmental material about Nine Wells. I never knew that's where the city used to draw its water supply from.'

She nodded, trying to control her excitement as she watched him nibble her bait.

'Then there's all this good arty-farty stuff on Kettles Yard and the Leper Chapel on Newmarket Road.' He flicked back

and forth through her neatly typed outline. 'It could work, you know.'

'Those are only a few suggestions. I've got lots more lined up.'

He pursed his lips and spun round in his chair.

'I don't want a fucking academic piece, Jude, it's got to come from the people, a vox pop. Yeah?'

She nodded enthusiastically.

'Get me a few interviews, then I'll give my final answer.' Jude left the room and shut his door.

'You'll have a pilot programme by the end of the week, mate. This is going to be a winner!'

A few days later David came home, tanned and triumphant after his two-week whistle stop tour of Northern Italy. He was shocked to see Jude so white and thin.

'Sweetheart,' he said, holding her at arm's length and scrutinising her. 'You look exhausted.'

'I've been busy,' she said with brittle brightness. 'Ward has just approved the pilot for my new thirteen-part series and,' she said, taking his hand and hurrying upstairs, 'I've been decorating.'

She flung open the door of their freshly painted bedroom.

'White!' he exclaimed. 'It looks like a nun's cell. But not for long, my love,' he murmured.

Jude tensed as he took hold of her and pulled her down on the bed.

'I missed you, Jude.'

She didn't say anything but kissed him fiercely on the mouth, determined to burn out her memories.

'I'm glad you're home,' she said, and meant it with all her heart – until they made love. She could neither move nor speak. Tears just flowed silently down her anguished face as she held on to him.

'Jude darling, what's the matter?'

She didn't want to lie, just shook her head. David held her tight and stroked her hair.

'Stay with me?' she whispered. 'Don't leave me.'

'Of course.' He rocked her in his arms and kissed her wet face. 'You're overwrought, love, you've been working too hard. It has to stop,' he added firmly. 'I can't have my lover lose all her beautiful looks.'

Letters were still arriving from Jonathan. Luckily Jude got to the post before David and hid them. The phone calls were more difficult.

'Jonathan!' David exclaimed one night when he picked up the phone.

Jude froze in her tracks.

'Jude?' said David, turning to her.

She shook her head and mouthed, 'No.'

'Sorry, she's out. How are you?'

A brief, awkward conversation followed then David put the phone down and turned to Jude.

'What was all that about?'

'He and Claude are having troubles,' she lied.

'Again?'

'I don't want to get involved.'

'Quite right too,' he laughed. 'You're learning, Jude.'

'Yes,' she murmured, and left the room to hide her tears.

The next two months were hectic. Jude completed her series, Cambridge Secrets, and David was enjoying his junior fellowship, particularly after he'd been commissioned by Cambridge University Press to write a new academic profile on Byron.

'Talk about glittering prizes,' enthused Tony Watts, Professor of English, over a celebratory college dinner. 'You two have swept the board.'

The term ended, as always, with the May Balls. She and David went to Clare Ball and danced the balmy night away. As dawn broke over the River Cam a hundred pink and white balloons were released into the rosy sky. Couples spilled out

of the marquees on to the Backs and college bells chimed in a new day. Jude lay on the grass, her golden dress sparkling with dew, and quietly asked David to marry her. For a few seconds he stared at her then gathered her into his arms.

'Yes,' he whispered through her hair.

A new era had begun.

Chapter Eight

Jude woke to birdsong and sunshine. Stretching luxuriously between white linen sheets, she sniffed the rich aroma of coffee brewing downstairs.

'It's six-thirty,' David called from the kitchen.

'Coming,' she answered, not moving a muscle.

Their huge bed was set into a deep bay window that stood open to the lovely June morning. Albertine roses grew in heavy clusters around the window, loading the air with a perfume so sweet and fresh it made Jude's senses swim.

'Midsummer Day,' she murmured as she got up and walked naked on to the balcony that overlooked their large, secluded garden, a paradise of lilies, phlox, pinks, delphiniums, and drifts of roses. In a frothy haze of pink and cream, flowers led the eye down to the River Cam, flowing by, dappled with sunshine.

She loved their home with its rambling Victorian rooms, maze-like corridors and Gothic windows. On the Backs, it had originally belonged to one of the Darwin family but had later been bought by King's. Shortly after their marriage she and David had bought it for a song. When they'd first moved in, five years ago, they'd lived alongside the well-established black beetles and mice. Slowly, lovingly, they'd restored the house to its former grandeur. On a perfect Midsummer morning the memory of all the back-breaking work, the mud, the rain and the months of discomfort, faded away on the scent of roses.

'You look like Venus up there!' David's laughing voice from

below made Jude jump. 'Half of Cambridge will die of hitherto unknown bliss if they catch you like that.'

'It's too early for anybody to see me,' she yawned.

'Lucky me,' he answered, his eyes taking in the luscious curves of her body.

'Lucky me,' she answered, smiling at his open, loving face

The Osbornes radiated health, beauty and happiness. Everything they touched seemed to turn to gold. Friends openly referred to them as Mr and Mrs Success and everybody wanted a slice of their glittering lives. Five years of marriage had forged them into a powerful couple who loved and understood each other deeply. Despite their profound emotional need for each other they maintained strong identities and separate, independent careers.

'Do you want this breakfast I have so slavishly made for you?' David asked. 'Or do you want to go to London on an empty stomach?'

'Give me a minute,' Jude cried, heading for the shower.

Ten minutes later she was downstairs, wearing a blue linen dress and blue suede shoes. David was halfway through breakfast, munching toast as he worked his way through a pile of mail on the table.

'That lot's yours,' he said, nodding towards several envelopes by her plate.

Jude flicked through the letters as she sipped her coffee. Suddenly her heart lurched and she quickly set down her cup before she dropped it. Across the top of a thick manilla envelope was printed, in large script 'HIBBS the PUBLISHERS'. Checking that David wasn't watching her she quickly slit open the envelope and read the letter.

Dear Ms Summers,
We have read your manuscript, Secrets, *and would like to discuss it further with you. Perhaps you could get in touch . . .*

Without finishing the letter, Jude quickly folded it and slipped it into her pocket.

'Anything good?' David asked, reaching out for another slice of toast.

'No, not really.'

Why am I lying? she asked herself, growing hot with guilt. I need time to take it in, she reasoned. Grabbing her bag, she leant across the table and kissed David's tousled blond hair.

''Bye, love. Thanks for breakfast.'

Still feeling guilty, she cycled across the common, knee-deep in cow parsley and buttercups, and headed for the railway station. I'll tell him I've written a book tonight, she told herself firmly, over a bottle of vintage champagne. That'll ease the shock. Having made a positive decision she then turned her attention to the beauty of the morning.

As the Liverpool Street train zipped through the ripening wheat fields and the flat Cambridgeshire countryside gave way to London overspill, Jude read and re-read her letter from Hibbs. She'd never imagined they'd reply, never mind respond so quickly and positively. She'd had the idea for the book about a year ago and had immediately asked Claudia out for lunch to bend her ear with the outline.

'It's a racy story about the sexual transgressions of two semi-fictitious Oxbridge dons.'

'Great! Lots of screwing,' Claudia replied, instantly warming to any irreverent subject. 'Does the Proctor get caught with his knickers down?'

'No,' Jude rebuked her. 'That would be mean. He's a friend of David's.'

'That would make it even funnier,' Claudia giggled.

Five years on and Claudia's opinion of Cambridge and academia hadn't changed a bit. If anything it was even more caustic than before.

'Come on, Claude, this book isn't a personal vendetta. It's going to be fun. Listen . . .' Jude worked her way through the

story and Claudia listened intently. 'What d'you reckon?' Jude asked when she'd eventually talked herself to a standstill. 'Do you think it's worth writing?'

Claudia drained her glass and smiled excitedly. 'If you don't write it – I will!'

Fired with enthusiasm, Jude started *Secrets* that day and wrote the entire manuscript on the train, going back and forth to London, over the space of nine months. Apart from Claudia she'd kept the whole thing to herself, superstitiously afraid of talking about the book in case she lost her nerve. When it was finished she had awful withdrawal symptoms, missing her characters and their dangerous, wild relationship.

'Send the bloody thing off!' Claudia had bossed after she'd read the completed manuscript. 'It's knock-out, Jude. What're you dithering about for?'

'I still haven't told David,' she admitted.

'For fuck's sake!' Claudia cried. 'Think negative. The publishers might reject it then and you'll never have to tell him.'

Jude burst out laughing.

'It never crossed my mind I'd be rejected.'

'The arrogance of the woman!' Claudia mocked. 'Give the bloody thing to me and I'll mail it,' she said, sticking the manuscript into her bag.

'Who to?' Jude panicked.

'I'll try Hibbs first. I had a dirty weekend with one of their commissioning editors last Easter and he's still got the hots.' Claudia smiled wickedly.

Jude knew the heartache that lay behind her beguiling but utterly misleading smile. She still adored Jonathan who now lived in Los Angeles, directing films some of the year and teaching in college the rest. Occasionally he'd take a sabbatical term off and come to London, to work for the BBC. Jude had never laid eyes on him since that fateful spring evening so long ago, and oddly enough neither Claudia nor David had questioned the very obvious breakdown of their friendship.

David seemed relieved to have Jonathan completely out of his life, though he still had a great affection for Claudia. There had been several moments when Jude had nearly told her about the night with Jonathan but every time she opened her mouth the words just flew away. Now it was too late. As time passed so did the memory and sometimes Jude wondered if she hadn't just dreamt it all.

Nothing had changed with Claudia and Jonathan. He maintained the same politically correct, liberal line about their open relationship and Claudia either went with it or kissed it goodbye. It was utterly incomprehensible to Jude who had seen her friend nearly suicidal in the last few years. Her need for Jonathan clearly outweighed his for her. He could take the long separations but as she grew older Claudia couldn't. She didn't say she wanted to settle down and share a home with him, that would have been very uncool, but it was obviously exactly what she did want. They never met in the States, only in England on his short visits when they virtually never got out of bed.

Whenever Jude reflected on the differences in their life styles she thanked her lucky stars she had an adoring husband and a secure, lovely home. Both she and David were professionally well established in their chosen careers. David was now a Senior Lecturer in the Cambridge English faculty, and a Senior Fellow of King's College with his own suite of rooms overlooking the chapel. He'd got four successful publications to his name, was *the* expert on Anglo-Italian Romantic Literature, and was tipped in all the right places to be well on the way to a professorship. Claudia's domestic life in Notting Hill rocked between ecstasy and depression depending on which side of the Atlantic Jonathan was on. Luckily her media career was unaffected by her love life. She was a dynamic, well known television presenter, with a name for witty, radical, literary-based programmes, usually for London Weekend Television or Channel 4.

So, Jude mused as the train zipped through Bishops

Stortford, why hadn't she told her perfect, adoring husband about the book she'd written that year? Fear, embarrassment, or just a need for privacy? Essentially, she knew, it was because the book was set in his beloved academic city, in several of its most famous colleges. It was a witty, affectionate, eccentric look at two gay dons coming out of the closet in a Cambridge still locked in its weird and wonderful traditions. Screamingly irreverent at times, *Secrets* was bound to upset David so she simply hadn't mentioned it. Plus the fact, she harshly reminded herself, that David would have preferred her to have a baby rather than write a book.

Six months ago he had made it perfectly clear he wanted a child and was getting pretty sick of waiting. Jude had been avoiding the issue, thinking it wiser not to get to the discussion stage but leave it as a vague, abstract theory in the background. David's laying it on the line made her previous polite but firm tactics impossible.

'I can't possibly have a baby,' she'd argued. 'Not now, just when Forum's taking off in a big way.'

'Oh, come on, Jude,' he'd snapped impatiently. 'Is there ever going to be a right time in your career? You'll move from radio to television and create another successful series, which of course you won't be able to leave, certainly not for a baby.'

He'd been very angry, possibly angrier than she'd ever seen him in their married life. She'd promised to think seriously about starting a family over the next six months. By Jude's reckoning she'd got until Christmas before he asked her again, and this time she felt she couldn't say no. The book could only rub salt in an already open wound.

Jude ignored the letter crackling in her pocket and turned her attention back to the script she'd been trying to memorise since the train pulled out of Cambridge railway station. Radio 4's Forum was Jude's pride and joy. She'd moved to Broadcasting House in London three years ago, hungry for a challenge after two years of local radio. Initially she'd worked

as a writer and researcher, moving around departments, until finally she'd landed a permanent job with Woman's Hour. Specialising in the arts, she'd built up quite a reputation for herself as an intellectual young woman who could get a discussion going between the most unlikely and discordant guests. Her ability and popularity had quickly opened the way for her own weekly arts programme.

Jude had thought carefully about the kind of package she would eventually be responsible for writing and presenting. She wanted a strong, provocative and balanced programme that would attract all sorts of people, even those who normally avoided media coverage. Selecting only three guests at a time, she managed to combine clerics with entrepreneurs, New Aryans with New Age Travellers, and White Witches with footballers. Friday morning audience ratings zoomed whenever Jude hit the airwaves and she was suddenly dubbed Radio 4's 'Thinking Woman'.

As the train shunted into Liverpool Street station Jude carefully collected up her script, packed her bag and reached for her coat. Oblivious as always to the heads that turned as she passed by, she hurried on her way. Five years on she was even more beautiful. The delicacy of her younger face, with its perfect nose, dreaming grey eyes and full lips, was now strengthened by the mature lines of her strong chin and sweeping, elegant cheekbones. Her dark gold hair was just as long and thick, but now cut more stylishly. Her body too had taken on more definite lines. Her full breasts and curving hips contrasted strikingly with her long slim thighs, slender shoulders and taut, flat stomach. With a full-time desk job Jude was rigorous about her exercise schedule, swimming or running being part of her daily routine.

She took the underground to Oxford Circus which, even before nine, was busy with shoppers and tourists. A brief moment of comparative peace descended around the church of All Souls, Langham Place, then she was through the revolving doors and into the reception area of BBC Broadcasting House

Apart from the fact that her name tag allowed her free access anywhere in the building, she was familiar to the porters who nodded and smiled at her as she ran to take the lift to the sixth floor. Even though it had only just turned 9 she felt nervous butterflies in her stomach as she anticipated the tense countdown to the 10.05 live broadcast, immediately after the national news. Luckily butterflies were now a familiar sensation, as opposed to the cramping terror she'd known in earlier days. As she walked into her room Sandra, her secretary, handed her a cup of coffee and the telephone.

'Gareth's in the studio. I'm off to meet the guests.'

Jude went through a few last-minute details with her producer then sat and drank her coffee, going down her script, checking and marking questions that could be expanded if they were running under time, and those she could cut if they were going over. She then joined Sandra in one of the hospitality rooms and met her guests, face to face, for the first time. No matter how much she'd previously talked to them on the phone, or read their plays and books, even scandalous accounts of their lives in the tabloid press, it was always fascinating to meet the people themselves. This week she'd been particularly preoccupied with the Buddhist monk, thinking he was bound to be swamped by the talkative nun from Liverpool whose latest play on female AIDS victims was sweeping the London fringe theatres. Nothing could have been further from the truth. The monk was devastatingly handsome, very upper-class and extremely forthcoming. Sister Francesca was in danger of drying up, until the rabbi from Scotland, with the flaming red hair and a thick Glaswegian accent, found his voice and drowned the lot of them. It was always good to have that half an hour in hospitality together, knocking about ideas before the programme got underway.

It was only in the studio, waiting for the red on-air light to come up, that Jude's stomach churned with nerves. As the mike opened and Forum's introductory music played out, Gareth's familiar thumbs-up from the production box

brought an easy smile to her face. After a slow, definitely polite start, the guests suddenly forgot their nerves and went at it hammer and tongs. Jude had her work cut out trying to persuade at least two of them to pause for breath while the other was given a few minutes to voice their opinion. As she drew the programme to an end and the music played them out, her guests were still talking, all the way out of the studio and up the corridor, back into hospitality for another round of coffee and Danish pastries. Jude left them in reception, swopping addresses and phone numbers, all determined to get together just as soon as they could.

Drained, she took the lift back to her room and slumped in her chair, letting out a long sigh of relief. Suddenly the letter crackled in her pocket, nagging at her already feverish brain. Damn it! Why hadn't she spoken out right away this morning? 'Oh, David. Guess what? I've got a lunch appointment with the editorial director at Hibbs. What a turn up!' Instead she was carrying the letter around with her, like it was some hideous dark secret from her past. Irritated with herself, Jude swung out of her chair just as the phone rang.

'Jude Summers,' she said briskly.

'Sweetheart, I've just heard the programme. Wasn't the rabbi terrific?'

Jude was surprised. David usually listened to her programme but rarely phoned her up quite so promptly after it. As if reading her thoughts he added, 'I thought I'd give you a ring just to check out a couple of things for tomorrow's supper. Have you got a minute?'

David loved his Cambridge parties and was ingenious in their creation, from start to finish. This one was rather special: a celebration to launch his new book. His four previous publications were heavy academic pieces but this latest publication, on the advice of his editor, was a bridge between a heavy text and a popular read. David had chosen his subject carefully. Inevitably Byron and Italy, combined with love, sex and infidelity, the end result being a rollicking

but educational read that would hopefully grab the middle classes and make David a packet. He wanted to celebrate by throwing a big party and cooking his favourite Italian dishes. For a couple married five years they still enjoyed doing things together and had spent a lot of time and care working out a party menu they could share between them.

'I've got the cream cheese and clover honey for your dessert but no artichokes for starters. I could get something else if you've got an alternative in mind?' He paused but Jude didn't have a thought in her head.

'Sorry, David,' she admitted. 'I can't think of anything right now.'

'That's OK. I'll do a fish risotto.'

'Perfect,' she said, and was just about to add, 'Oh, by the way I got a letter this morning from Hibbs the publishers,' when David said a cheery, "Bye,' and put the phone down.

It rang again, almost immediately. This time it was Claudia.

'Hi, Jude. Have you heard from Hibbs?'

'How did you know?'

Claudia laughed excitedly. 'I don't know anything – tell me.'

'An editor wants to meet me next week for lunch,' Jude cried. 'I'm sure it's just a polite enquiry,' she added, trying to keep her feelings under control.

'No way, Jude, you're in there,' Claudia said. 'Lunch on the ever-dwindling publisher's expense account is only for the dead certs, believe me.'

Jude did.

'Oh, Claude, it could be so good,' she sighed, delirium finally flooding her.

'It could be fucking brilliant!' Claudia added. 'Just wait till David's colleagues clap eyes on it.'

Jude gulped.

'I haven't told him yet.'

'What?' Claudia burst out laughing. 'Jude, you've been writing the thing for nearly a year. Surely even David must have noticed something?'

'No. I wrote the manuscript on the train or here in the office. I didn't feel easy writing it when he was around, so I sort of kept it a secret.'

Claudia started to giggle. 'So now what? Do you go for a nom de plume?'

Jude smiled, suddenly seeing the funny side of things.

'I'll tell him tonight.'

'You're scared, aren't you?' Claudia asked, instantly hitting the right button.

'A bit,' Jude admitted.

'Why? Because you haven't written the book in rhyming pentameters?'

'Stop winding me up, Claude. I'm scared he'll be upset about all the Cambridge stuff.'

'Jude, he *will* be upset about all the Cambridge stuff, but if he'd just loosen up for five minutes he might get to like it.'

Gareth suddenly popped his head around Jude's door.

'Sorry, love,' he called. 'Bad news.'

Claudia heard. 'Go and check out your bad news and tell David tonight.'

Gareth certainly did have bad news. One of the following week's guests had just phoned to say she was dropping out after hearing that morning's programme.

'Which one?' Jude asked.

'The gay ballerina,' Gareth explained. 'She told Sandra that the programme had a sexist slant and she couldn't handle oppressive men.' Jude had long ago, way back in her early days at Radio Cambridgeshire, ceased to be surprised by listeners' views and reactions, but this was serious.

'Oh, for goodness' sake!' she cried. 'Where do we get another guest at such short notice?' Suddenly the criticism hit home. 'Do you think we might have a sexist slant in the programme?' she asked, shocked.

'No bloody way,' Gareth exclaimed. 'She has, we don't,' he added emphatically.

Jude felt better for that.

'So, now we're left with the single-parent politician and the Leeds Bingo woman who's opened a nursery for working mothers. Who would go with them?' she said, thinking out loud.

'A child psychoanalyst,' Sandra joked.

Gareth and Jude stared at each other.

'That's not a joke,' he said. 'It's a bloody good idea.'

'I'll phone the Tavistock Clinic,' Jude said. 'It's crawling with shrinks.'

The clinic was indeed chock-a-block with experts of every nature. It took a while to track down a child therapist and even longer to find one who might be available for a radio interview the following week. Finally Jude hit lucky and arranged to meet Dr Grace Rosenberg on Monday for lunch.

'We could finish up with a better programme than we originally planned,' she told Sandra as they packed up and left the office for the weekend.

'I hope so,' said her assistant, ruefully checking her watch. 'I've missed Safeways so it's pick up a take-away on the way home. Ah well, at least the kids will be happy.'

Jude too had missed the shops and couldn't buy David's favourite champagne as she'd planned to do. Well, that's that, I'll have to tell him cold, she thought as the slow train stopped and started all the way down the track to Cambridge. It had been a long day and at this moment, with her head drooping against the hard seat, she was past caring about anything.

When she got home David was out. There was a message on the blackboard in the kitchen: 'Gone to play squash. Back for supper.' Jude appreciatively sniffed the casserole David had left cooking in the oven. She was lucky to live with a man who not only liked cooking but was good at it too. She opened a bottle of chilled Chardonnay poured out a glass and took it into the garden where, even now, at 8.30, the evening was soft and light. Jude wound her way up and down the garden paths, dead-heading her roses as she went, then stood on the terrace, working out a table plan for tomorrow night's supper.

She'd open the line of french windows on to the terrace and arrange a buffet table under the trellis, hung with wistaria and honeysuckle. She'd hang silver lanterns from the trellis roof and have candles on the table, laid with white cloths and decorated with huge bowls of roses. Delighted with her plan, she smiled. How she loved this place. It wasn't just a home, it was a haven. Finishing her wine, she went upstairs and ran a deep hot bath. David walked in as she was sitting on the floor, towelling herself dry.

'Hi, love,' he said, kissing her damp hair. 'You look tired.'

'I am,' she said, leaning her face against his. 'Thanks for making the supper. It smells so good.' He kissed her nose and pulled her to her feet.

'Let's eat.'

'David,' she said, burying her face in the bath towel and rubbing her hair and ears a little longer than was necessary, 'I'm having lunch with the editorial director at Hibbs next week.'

There, she'd said it. What a relief. She peeked through her hair and saw his surprised expression.

'Oh, why?'

This is it, she thought. Go for it.

'I've written a book,' she blurted out.

David's expression changed from surprise to shock as he sat down on the toilet seat.

'A book?'

'It's called *Secrets* and it's about two Cambridge dons who fall in love and get up to all sorts of things, academic and otherwise,' she said in a nervous rush.

'Anybody we know?' he asked, going a little pale.

'No, no, no. It's all totally fictitious, just set in Cambridge.'

'In King's?' he asked, a furrow forming on his brow.

'Of course not,' she said airily. 'I've made up all the college names. All the characters' names, even the characters themselves,' she said, sitting on his knee and letting the towel fall to the floor. 'Darling, it's all made up,' she assured him.

'I wouldn't do anything to upset you, believe me.' Gently running her hands through his hair, she kissed him on the mouth. When she looked into his eyes he was staring straight back at her, deadly serious.

'Jude, writing a book is a big deal. I should know, I've just finished my fifth. It eats into your life and your psyche.' He tapped his temple. 'Twenty-four hours a day it's there, it doesn't go away.' He paused then said, 'You must've had quite a good reason for not telling me about it.'

'I just wanted to write it, not talk about it,' she admitted. 'I wrote it on the train, back and forth to London, and in a way I sort of left it on the train at the end of the day. I was afraid to talk about it in case the magic went away.'

An awkward silence fell between them. Jude picked up the fallen towel and hung it on the rail then walked across the landing into her study that overlooked the garden. From the top drawer of her desk she took out the manuscript.

'This is it,' she said, returning to the bathroom and handing it to David. 'Read it and make your own mind up.'

It was an uncomfortable evening, quite different from their usual relaxed Friday nights when they wound down together, enjoying an easy meal with lots of wine and often watching a late-night video. After supper David said he'd work to do and went into his study. Jude lay on the sofa in the lounge and watched television, all the time worrying about David and the book. It could only escalate the differences between them about starting a family. She'd got enough spare time to write a book. Why then couldn't she make the time to have David's baby?

Chapter Nine

Usually they lay in bed late on a Saturday morning, reading the papers, drinking coffee or just making love, but this Saturday was different. With a buffet supper for forty to prepare there were umpteen things to do. Jude woke up first and went for a run along Grantchester Meadows, clamorous with birdsong and the monotonous call of a lone cuckoo. Feeling better for her five-mile run, she returned home and had a quick shower then set about making the pastry for one of her desserts. As she rolled out the floury dough David's hands suddenly wound around her waist and his lips nuzzled her neck.

'I've read it,' he breathed.

Jude turned, her face bright and expectant.

'And?'

'It's very good,' he said, kissing her hard on the mouth. 'I'm sorry.'

'No, no!' she protested, holding his face with her buttery fingers. 'I'm sorry for being so . . .' She paused, searching for the right word, then burst out laughing. 'Secretive.'

'With a title like that, I suppose you had to be,' he added, opening her mouth with his tongue.

'I thought you'd start changing things,' she muttered as his hands slithered under her T shirt and fondled her breasts.

'I wouldn't change a thing,' he murmured, throwing off her T shirt and rolling down her leggings.

Jude stopped, her hand on his zipper.

'You mean it?'

He nodded, his hand on her left buttock, stroking the silky curve of her hip and thigh.

'You don't mind anything?' she asked.

He closed his eyes and groaned as he felt the soft, wet inside of her.

'Anything?' she insisted, pulling away from him to check his expression.

'The only thing I mind right now is your not undoing my flies. My balls are breaking!'

Laughing and giggling Jude unzipped his jeans and bent to kiss his belly and swollen cock.

'Oh, Jude,' he gasped, as he lay on the kitchen floor and pulled her on top of him. 'I love you.'

They made love right there, squashed up between the fridge and the kitchen table, showered by flour they nudged off the table as they rolled and moaned below it.

'I could stay here all day,' she sighed, licking the flour off his chest. David bent to kiss her nipples and banged his head on the table.

'It would be a lot more comfortable upstairs?' he suggested, rubbing his temple.

'No way,' Jude answered firmly. 'We've thousands to feed. Let's get chopping and boiling.'

'Hold it,' he said as she struggled to get up. 'It was the baby that upset me,' he confessed.

Jude froze. Suddenly it was '*the baby*', like it had an identity.

'I kept thinking that while you were writing the book you could have been pregnant and writing here, in the house.'

Jude wriggled free and sat up. She needed a clear brain for this kind of conversation.

'What I know about being pregnant is that ninety-nine percent of your time is taken up with baby thoughts, not one hundred thousand words.'

'Sure, but if you were to get into novels you could work from home. We could get a live-in nanny and have a huge family,' he added jokingly.

Jude smiled thinly. 'Let's see if I get into novels first, shall we?' she said, reaching for her discarded T-shirt.

David smiled as she dressed herself.

'Your becoming a novelist could be the answer to all our problems.'

'But I love my job in London,' she said, guilty that she sounded greedy but determined not to blur any important edges.

'You won't when you get into books. They take over, believe me.'

'We'll see,' she said, feigning a brightness she certainly didn't feel. 'Now, let's get cooking.'

Jude roasted ham and a turkey while David made ciabatta bread and Italian side dishes with salami, olives, prosciutto crudo, ricotta and mozzarella. By three the kitchen was steaming hot and every surface was covered with food.

'That's all my desserts finished,' Jude said, as she put the soft fruit and creamy syllabub into the fridge. 'If I don't get out of this kitchen I'll start eating everything in it. Fancy a swim?'

David shook his head.

'No. I think I'll pop over to college to check my post.'

Jude nodded. Not a day passed in David's life when he didn't call into King's. Even on the rare occasions when he hadn't work to do, he'd still wander over just to pick up messages on his answerphone.

'OK. See you later,' she said. 'Don't be late back.'

King's outdoor pool was almost empty. Though it was late-June they'd had a lot of cool wet days and the water was still cold. Jude dived in and the smack of water against her body sent a shiver of pleasure down the length of her spine. As she did twenty lengths, ploughing up and down without stopping, she pushed all problems out of her head. To hell with guilt, she thought as she touched the end of the pool and spun round underwater, she was going to enjoy tonight's party and see Hibbs' editor just as soon as she could.

* * *

Jude dressed carefully for the party. She'd planned to wear black but the softness of the June evening prompted her to look through her summer clothes. She picked out one of her favourites: a heavy, cream silk shift she'd bought in Venice on their last visit. It was short and loose with shoestring straps that emphasised her slender shoulders and full breasts. She chose a heavy gold-coloured necklace and ear-rings that reflected the light in her hair, and finished the outfit off with bronze high-heeled sandals she'd bought in a Ravel sale after Christmas.

'Wow! You look wonderful,' David exclaimed as she walked downstairs.

She spun round, happy and excited.

'It's going to be a good party,' she promised. 'I feel it in my bones.'

David circled her spinning body with his arms.

'It's going to be very good,' he said, caressing her nipples. 'I feel it in my – '

Laughing, Jude pushed him up the stairs.

'I don't want to know where you feel it. Go and change before they all arrive.'

While David showered and sang silly songs at the top of his voice, Jude spread the tables on the terrace with snowy white cloths and set out bowls of fragrant roses from her garden. In between the flowers she arranged the silver candelabra and lit the candles and the lanterns, hanging from the trellis, then brought out antipasti in ceramic and terracotta dishes. It looked perfect. Jude opened the long row of french windows to the lounge and put on a CD of Monteverdi's madrigals. As the rich, vibrant music filled the house and spilled out into the night Jude smiled to herself. She and David would be all right. This was another bridge to cross, perhaps the biggest one so far, but they'd survive it. Opening the first bottle of champagne she popped the cork across the terrace and poured herself a glass of cool, clear wine. Her career

was on the edge of the unknown right now and it made her pulse race with excitement.

'*Secrets*,' she whispered into the still of the soft evening, and raising her glass she drank to her own success.

The ring of the front doorbell made her jump.

'Coming,' David called, running downstairs with his hair still damp, wearing navy linen trousers and a pale blue silk shirt.

'You look stunning,' she said, taking his hand.

'The perfect couple,' he said, smiling proudly as he opened the door to their guests.

They'd chosen with care, wanting an easy relaxed evening that didn't get too heavy with academic politics. The Master of King's and his wife were there, as were several dons from the college and their partners. Also David's closest friends from the English faculty and several visiting scholars from America and Australia. There were old friends from outside the university, their local MP, Jude's doctor, their eccentric architect friends, even the vicar and his Buddhist sister, also Jude's friends from radio, television and the theatre. With such a dynamic, scintillating mix of people the party was immediately underway. Guests moved freely from lounge to terrace then out into the garden, where David and Jude moved amongst them, stopping to chat as they refilled empty champagne glasses. Jude glittered like the brightest star, happy, radiant and completely relaxed. She was having a ball.

'Your wife gets more beautiful every day,' the Master remarked to David as Jude gave him a welcoming kiss. 'Does she have a secret?'

David smiled knowingly.

'I think she's clever enough to have quite a few.'

Jude laughed as she wound her arm around his waist.

'You have the whole world at your feet,' the Master said with a fond smile. 'What will you Osbornes produce next?'

'Maybe another book,' Jude said, winking at David as she topped up the Master's glass.

David's editor, a rather formal young man called Martin, stopped Jude in the lounge and introduced her to his partner, a tall, thin, stylish woman in an expensive combination of beige and olive ethnic cloth.

'This is Rose Traverse,' Martin said. 'She works at Hibbs.'

Jude caught her breath.

'Pleased to meet you,' she said, quickly recovering and shaking Rose's cool hand.

'I think we should be celebrating another book right now, don't you?' Rose said very quietly.

Jude stared, her eyes wide with surprise.

'I read your manuscript last week,' Rose whispered. 'It's the best!'

Martin looked a little shocked.

'Rose, really! Jude hasn't even talked to Reece-Jones yet.'

'She will, won't you?'

'Yes, next week,' Jude answered.

'For lunch,' Rose added. 'Make it Wednesday,' she advised. 'He'll be like a bear with a headache when he gets back from his New York trip. Give him a day or two to chill out. Shall I book you in for one o'clock?' Jude nodded, more and more surprised.

'Rose forgot to tell you she's Reece-Jones's senior editor,' Martin explained.

'And I get the pick of the crop to work on,' Rose confided. Taking Jude's elbow she led her away from Martin. 'Anybody here cross-dressing?' she asked wickedly.

Jude burst out laughing.

'That was only in my book. These are all our friends. Some are from the university. Not all,' she added.

'Don't worry,' Rose teased. 'I've already worked out who the university bunch are. They're the ones talking about themselves, right?'

'They do find it hard to leave their work behind,' Jude said

diplomatically. 'Come and help me hand round the fish risotto and I'll introduce you to a few interesting people.'

Guests took their food and sat at the candlelit tables. Jude smiled at Rose's stunned expression as she sat beside one of King's more right-wing fellows, talking about his wife.

'I keep her in the country,' he said, spreading butter thickly on his ciabatta and biting into it as he spoke.

'What, like a donkey?' Rose asked.

The fellow assumed she was joking and hardly registered her shocked, disapproving expression, but Martin saw it and quickly cut in, directing the conversation away from the domestic to the literature of the Italian Renaissance.

'Does he really keep his wife in the country?' Rose seethed to Jude.

'Yes, but it doesn't matter. He's gay and she adores her vegetable garden, so everybody's happy,' Jude explained.

'So why marry?'

'Convention. Got to do the right thing,' Jude explained.

'I like the characters in your book much more,' Rose whispered. 'Whoops, here comes Martin!'

'He looks so uptight,' Jude whispered.

'And it's not just with me,' Rose added with a laugh. 'You should see him at work.'

After dessert David rapped the top table with a heavy silver spoon and thanked his guests for coming along, then introduced his editor to them. Martin stood up and eulogised about the book, waxing embarrassingly lyrical about David's ability to bring Byron to the people and bridge the gap between the lay read and the academic tome. His creepiness made Jude squirm in her seat. Seeing her expression, Rose whispered, 'Isn't he a pompous slime ball?'

Jude nodded, and quickly covered her mouth to hide her smile.

'I chatted him up because I was dying to meet you,' Rose added.

'I hope it was worth it!'

After supper they danced on the lawn till three in the morning then slowly the guests drifted away. Dawn was just breaking by the time Jude and David fell into bed.

'What a perfect night,' he said as he pulled her into his arms.

'Wonderful,' Jude yawned. 'I hope it brings your book good luck.' Mine too, she thought as she closed her eyes and sleep engulfed her.

The week that was to change her life began in its usual hectic fashion. As usual she was up at 6.30 and on the 7.20 train into London. By 9 she was in Broadcasting House and going through the diary on her desk, chock-a-block with meetings from Monday through till Friday. Her priority job every Monday morning was to talk to her guests on the phone. Taking notes as she chatted, she began to outline the first draft script. After a quick sandwich lunch with Dr Rosenburg at the Tavistock Clinic she was able to expand her script, drawing fascinating facts and figures from a newly published book on bad parenting. It was always thrilling to see how, each week, a programme took on its own shape and dimension. Even before her guests met up Jude could feel their differences. She purposely added questions to her script that might unify or polarise them. It was easy to argue; the cleverest approach was to communicate and elucidate. With Sandra's help she was able to get the first script typed up and printed off on the word processor, then nip over to Gareth's office and discuss it with him.

There was a farewell drinks party at six for a colleague leaving radio presentation for television. Jude had an orange juice then slipped away, keen to get the train home and finish Dr Rosenburg's riveting book before she went to bed that night. Tuesday was even more hectic with a retraining morning in the studio, and an introduction to new computerised editing equipment. By the end of the morning Jude's head throbbed from being in the studio too long.

'I swear they make the new equipment even more sophisticated just to create an army of boffins and then we end up with less money for programme making,' she grumbled as they left the studio.

'Come on, I'll buy you a BBC sandwich,' Gareth joked. 'That should really cheer you up.'

As a result of the retraining session Jude got home late on Tuesday night and on Wednesday morning, when she planned to get up really early and dress carefully for her publisher's lunch, she overslept.

'Oh, no!' she cried, as she stared in horror at the hands on her alarm clock. 'It's seven-thirty.'

'You probably needed an extra hour's sleep,' David yawned beside her. 'I certainly did.'

'It's my lunch date today,' Jude panicked. 'With Reece-Jones from Hibbs.'

'For crying out loud,' David grumbled. 'Lunchtime's hours away.'

'What am I going to wear?' she flustered as she skimmed through her packed wardrobe.

'Anything,' David replied, getting out of bed and heading for the bathroom. 'You always look beautiful.'

Jude ignored his vote of confidence and grabbed a black suit. Looking at her reflection in the mirror, she flung it on the bed in disgust.

'It's not a funeral,' she reminded herself.

Nothing was right. Suits, dresses, skirts and trousers lay in a discarded heap on the bed.

'For God's sake!' David exclaimed when he walked out of the bathroom. 'Choose something fast or you'll miss the next train.'

Jude stared at the pretty lawn dress she was holding against her naked body.

'That looks sweet,' David said tentatively.

'I don't want to look sweet,' she cried, her eyes wide with frustration. 'I want to look right on and sexy.'

'OK. Black jeans and leathers, with the silver necklace and ear-rings.'

'Perfect,' she said.

Ten minutes later she was cycling across the common wearing just that, looking extremely right-on and sexy.

The train was late so Jude had plenty of time for reading and re-drafting her script. Luckily it was a fairly quiet morning, apart from a budget planning meeting at eleven.

'I hope it doesn't go on all day,' Jude fretted. 'I've got to be out of here by twelve-thirty.'

'I wonder there's anything left to plan,' Gareth moaned. 'We'll soon be cut back to a mike and a set of batteries.'

'We're OK,' she reasoned. 'It's the drama series that are in for the chop this time.'

'*What* drama series?' Gareth cried in despair.

The meeting did go on and on and on. By 12.45 Jude felt like walking out, but nobody ever did that. The arts administrator finally wrapped up the meeting just before 1 and Jude whizzed out of the building and into a passing taxi. When she got to Daphne's, Torquil Reece-Jones and Rose were already there, drinking exotic-looking mineral water. Reece-Jones was in his mid-thirties, bald, fit and tanned, with intelligent dark brown eyes which looked definitely jet-lagged. Rose didn't let on that she and Jude knew each other but smiled warmly with a knowing twinkle in her eye. They ordered a light salad lunch then it was straight down to business.

'The book's just great, Jude,' Torquil started without any preamble. 'Lively, witty, beautifully written. You've got a great ear for dialogue, you know.'

Jude blushed and smiled with delight as Torquil discussed in minute detail Robert and Duncan, her Cambridge characters, and their bizarre amorous escapades.

'We all just love it,' he concluded. 'Don't we, Rose?'

She took her cue perfectly.

'It's the best,' she said, using her favourite expression.

'We've been looking for a nineties Tom Sharpe for some

time. It was just a question of waiting, somebody had to turn up eventually. Oxbridge colleges throw one up every ten years, but I tell you, Jude, I'm delighted that it's *you*.' He took a long pull of his fancy, fizzy raspberry water and beamed. 'We have one hell of a beautiful woman as our author, Rose,' he added. 'Your face, Jude, set against those autumnal ivory towers, is the best piece of free publicity we've had in years.'

Jude wondered what her face had to do with anything, least of all a book about two gay Oxbridge dons who loved gardening, dressmaking and the Ancient sGreek Rose read her expression and said, 'You're the thinking man's woman, Jude. Well, that's your radio tag anyway, and we're going to use it to the full to promote *Secrets*. If you don't mind, of course?'

Jude wasn't sure whether she minded or not.

'Won't the book sell on its own strengths?' she asked nervously.

'Of course, of course,' Torquil assured her. 'But it'll sell a whole lot more if we can add a little . . .' he paused then smiled '. . . wannabe quality.' After carefully choosing a low-calorie main course they all blew their good intentions and ordered a delicious creamy pastry dessert stuffed with blueberries.

'We'll get the first set of proofs off to you by . . .?' Torquil looked at Rose.

'The end of the month.'

'So soon?' Jude asked astonished.

'We have to rush this one, Jude,' he explained. 'We want *Secrets* in the shops and selling by October. The new academic year is a perfect time for a hard sell. If we miss this autumn then we'd have to wait till next year and that would be such a waste, don't you think?'

She nodded quickly. She was as keen as they were to see *Secrets* in the book shops.

'Now, about money?' he continued. 'Who's your agent?'

Jude shook her head. 'I haven't got one.'

Rose and Torquil glanced at each other.

'Better get one, sweetheart,' he advised. 'Though we could talk money to you . . .' He left the question hanging, clearly indicating it was up to her to decide.

'Any ideas for the front cover, Jude?' Rose asked.

'Not King's,' she instantly replied.

'Nothing too obvious,' Torquil agreed. 'Possibly the Senate House.' Rose registered Jude's anxious expression.

'There are lots of stunning buildings in Oxford,' she suggested. 'Balliol, for example.'

'Been done to death,' Torquil replied, as they all stood up, ready to go.

'Oxford's too political. Cambridge is much better, and renowned for its gays.'

With a cheery wave Torquil and Rose headed up the road, leaving Jude flagging down taxis. One finally stopped. She jumped into the back and slumped against the big empty seat. Wow! It was all happening – and so quickly. The minute she was back in her office she phoned Claudia.

'They want to publish in the autumn,' she gasped.

'Whoopee!'

'Claude, I'm scared,' Jude confessed.

'Oh, for God's sake, Jude. You're scared of your own success. What's up with you?'

'They might put King's on the front cover.'

It was music to Claudia's ears.

'That would be very funny.'

'It would kill David!'

'But it would bring in the punters,' Claudia pointed out. 'Who gives a shit what's on the cover, so long as it sells?'

'Oh, Claude.'

'Stop worrying about David and savour the sweetness of success,' said Claudia, suddenly waxing lyrical. 'Anyway, didn't you say he was going away next term?'

'Yes. To the States, in October.'

'Perfect timing. He'll miss the reviews.'

* * *

June suddenly turned into July and Jude was busier than ever. Trying to get three guests to do a live show in London on a Friday morning was increasingly difficult as the summer set in.

'Everybody's in bloody Devon, Martha's Vineyard or Tuscany,' Sandra grumbled as she put the phone down on yet another answering machine. 'Everybody but me and even I'm off next week, to Thetford Centre Park. Well, at least the kids'll be happy,' she finished in her usual lugubrious way.

'Lucky you,' Jude teased. 'I'm not going anywhere.'

She was in fact relieved not to be going anywhere at all, especially now with the proofs to check through. She'd take a holiday later, when things had settled down. Probably fly out to LA in November and spend some time with David in California.

Rose phoned her a few days after the proofs had arrived.

'How's it going?' she asked.

'I've done a bit,' said Jude. 'But I've got so much reading and writing to do during the week, for Forum, that I'm frightened of confusing Robert and Duncan with my Friday morning guests and accidentally writing them into the script.'

'Why not?' Rose cried. '*Secrets* would make a brilliant radio series.'

'One day. I can wait,' Jude answered. 'First, I've got to proof-read the book.'

'I've got the cover rough. It's fabulous. Do you want to see it?'

'Er . . . could I make it after work?' Jude suggested.

'Sure. Which night?'

'Not Friday, I'm clinically brain-dead. Thursday's no good either, I'm usually working late on the final script.'

'How about me driving up to Cambridge with it on Sunday afternoon?' Rose suggested. 'It'd be nice to get out of London.'

'Perfect. Come for lunch.'

On Friday night Jude sat on the train and looked through the proofs of *Secrets*. Fatigue fell away as she thrilled to the

sight of her book, beautifully laid out on crisp pages. It was a delight to re-read Robert and Duncan's wild adventures in King's Senior Common Room, now subtly renamed Cheyney College. Jude still marvelled at how these characters had taken over her mind and then her life for nearly a year. She realised life had been lonely without them and suddenly thought of writing another book. Write another book – and have a baby? That would solve all our problems, she thought, vividly recalling David's words. He'd kept his promise and not nagged her but she knew Christmas was his deadline and also knew he expected her to say yes.

The following morning, after her five-mile run, she sat at her desk and read her proofs until lunchtime. They had friends coming for supper so Jude cycled into town and bought cheese, fish, fresh fruit and vegetables off the market. Cambridge was so small after London, though now, with the onset of the tourist season, it wasn't quite so peaceful. There were hundreds of them, milling through the colleges or cycling with their arms flung round one another, usually the wrong way down busy streets. It was a hot, humid day and Jude's eye was caught by the cool summer dresses in Oasis' shop window. Without trying it on she bought a knitted silver dress, with thin straps, tight top and short straight skirt. Pleased with her buy Jude hurried home and started supper, then returned to her proof-reading. It was the kind of work that demanded total concentration, checking and re-checking names, spellings, paragraphs and page numbers from the start to the finish of the story. As soon as she felt her concentration slipping Jude stopped. She'd done about two-thirds by the time David came home from a conference he'd attended all day in London.

'Finish the rest in the morning,' he said, seeing her tired eyes. 'When you're bright-eyed and bushy-tailed.'

'I'll take an old pro's advice,' she answered, laying her face against his arm. 'Mmmm, you smell nice.'

He sniffed.

'Do I?' he asked, surprised. 'I thought I smelt of BR sandwiches.' He stroked her tousled hair as he quoted from the pages on her desk.

'"Robert traced the line of Duncan's strong hips, stopping at the curve of his thighs to cradle the soft heavy weight between his legs." Dear me, Jude,' he teased. 'What will your mother think?'

'Don't. I worry about what *everybody* will think.'

'Christ knows what they'll think of me after reading that,' David said, softly kissing her neck. 'Probably that I'm into vibrators.'

Jude burst out laughing.

'Follow me, vibrator-man, I want to have my way with you.' Drawing him across the landing and into the bedroom she threw off her flimsy summer dress.

'But I'm not Duncan or Robert,' he teased as he took off his clothes and felt her luscious breasts. 'I'm just the boring old fart you married half a century ago.'

Jude covered his mouth with hers and fell on to the bed, wriggling up and down his body until she had her thighs wrapped around his hips and felt him huge and wanting against her belly.

'Oh, Jude – fuck me,' he cried, in an ecstasy of delight as she rubbed herself up and down his swollen cock.

In a flash she lowered herself on to him. Moving slowly and rhythmically she swept up and down his body, her breasts brushing his lips, her nipples, pink and hard. Suddenly he came, crying a burst of love names, and held her tight in his arms as she reached her climax and fell exhausted against his chest.

'Oh, Jude,' David murmured into her tangled hair. 'You're the only woman for me.'

'David,' she whispered. 'Let's go to Venice for a long weekend.'

'Love, I've got so much to do before I leave for the States. I don't know whether I can spare the time.'

'But wouldn't it be nice to have a bit of time to ourselves?' she continued. 'And we could see Gabriele and Beata.' Beata had been in Cambridge in the early-spring, doing a week's research in the university library, but Gabriele she hadn't seen since her last trip to Venice, over a year ago. 'Think about it,' she urged.

'OK, but no promises.'

Jude didn't know as she made plans for the future how *Secrets* was to claim her time, not just for the next few weeks but right up until the end of the year.

By the time Rose arrived for lunch the next day the proofs were finished and Jude was keen to see the cover.

'Let's go for a walk,' Rose suggested as soon as they'd finished their coffee.

'What, now?' Jude asked, staring longingly at the portfolio on the sofa.

'Yes, it'll freshen us up, and do you know what? I've never seen the room where Robert and Duncan first had it away.'

'Oh, spare me the ghastly details,' David cried. 'I'll stay here and bury my head in the dishwasher. It'll make me feel a whole lot better than a tour of Robert and Duncan's knocking shops.'

As soon as they were out of the house Rose grabbed Jude's arm and said, 'I have the greatest news for you.'

Jude stared at Rose's flushed, excited face and her stomach lurched.

'Yes?' she asked, breathlessly.

'It's a long story. Let's sit over there, on that bench under the trees.' Rose marched Jude to the bench and sat down.

'Yes?' Jude demanded, hardly able to sit still.

'Well,' Rose started, savouring the moment, 'after your lunch date with Torquil he told me he was going to send *Secrets* off to his old buddy, Matthew Wade, at the BBC.'

'*What?*' Jude squeaked.

'The guy who runs the drama department.'

'I know,' Jude exclaimed.

'Anything Torquil likes lands right on Wade's desk,' Rose explained. 'I should know, I mail every single one of them myself. So, *Secrets* goes off and pretty soon, back comes a fax from Matthew Wade himself. I read it, of course,' she added with mocking self-importance. 'And Jude – he just loves your story.'

She opened her mouth to speak but nothing came out.

'Cool it. The best is yet to come.'

Jude held her breath.

'The Beeb have a million quids' worth of camera crew and equipment just waiting to start shooting a new series in London this autumn. The big-shot American star they lined up has just pulled out, his wife's run off with another big shot American star. I can't mention the name, though it begins with an R and ends with a G,' Rose winked.

'How do you know all this?' Jude gasped.

'Use your imagination, you've got lots of it.'

'And . . .?' Jude whispered faintly.

'Rather than waste his million quids' worth of camera crew, Wade wants to talk serious turkey about the feasibility of shooting *Secrets* this autumn.'

Jude stared and stared at Rose then grabbed her hands and danced around the bench with her.

'A word of caution,' she warned. 'Wade wants to talk, this week, about the reality of pulling this series off. We've all got a lot of homework to do if we're to convince him it's possible. But if we do, Jude . . .' She spread her hands expressively. 'You got it!'

It took Jude nearly two hours to simmer down. By the time they got back home she was pale but had stopped trembling.

'Blimey,' David remarked. 'You look like you've seen a ghost.'

Jude paused. The last thing she wanted was to tell him

another lie, but neither was she easy about telling him the truth. She needed time to take in this wonderful, astonishing news.

'We did see a ghost,' Jude answered lightly. 'Sort of. In King's Chapel. Robert and Duncan lookalikes. It was weird, wasn't it, Rose?'

'Very. The Robert character was too plump for my liking but Duncan was perfect. Now here's what I came for,' she said, reaching into her portfolio for the cover. 'What do you think of it?'

Jude was glad of something to focus her eyes on but her thoughts were elsewhere. *Secrets* – a major BBC television series. Was it really possible?

Matthew Wade asked Jude and her editors from Hibbs to lunch that week. Busy as she was Jude rearranged her entire diary to fit in Tuesday afternoon's appointment. She was no stranger to the Television Centre at White City, though previously she'd always had lunch in the big self-service restaurant, alongside camera operators, make-up, wardrobe, personnel, actors, directors and lighting technicians. This time they were upstairs, in a small, quiet restaurant with secluded tables and a good wine list. Not that anybody was drinking wine. Spritzers was as far as it went. Wade was a typical Northern grammar school lad who'd got a scholarship to Oxford where he'd met Torquil, twenty years before. He was easy and warm, no fuss or bullshit, no smoothie-talk back-slapping routine, just straight down to the business of programme making.

'I feel like I already know you, Jude,' he said as he shook her hand. 'I've been an avid listener to Forum since you first launched the programme. It's one of the best half-hour slots in Radio 4's week, if you ask me.' Jude could see he meant every word and smiled with pleasure. 'But I was an admirer of yours years ago,' he continued. 'When you were doing Woman's Hour.'

Torquil chortled into his glass.

'So tell us about your secret addiction to Woman's Hour, Matthew?' he teased.

'I used to listen to it when I was driving around England co-ordinating regional input. It was one of the few bright spots in my long lousy days, I can tell you.'

'I learnt so much from that programme,' Jude said.

'You had style then but now you've got it down to a fine art. Your book,' he said, tapping the manuscript he'd brought along with him, 'is brilliant.'

'I knew you'd go for it,' Torquil said. 'I always send Matt everything I like, even before publication. We've put together a few good deals in the past.'

The waiter brought their first course and Wade explained what Jude already knew from Rose.

'We're all set to shoot a big new six-part series in London this autumn,' he started. 'Everything's lined up and waiting to go. Contracts signed, money on the table, camera crew booked, lighting, sound, make-up, wardrobe – and talk of a tie-in with ABC in Australia. It's there.' He banged his big hand on the table. 'The only thing not in place is the big shot American star, who signed his contract way back in the spring and pulled out just two weeks ago. Marriage problems,' he said, taking a pull of his Spritzer. 'Do me a favour.' He looked imploringly at Torquil. 'The guy's been married four times, you'd think he could pick the right woman the fifth time around.'

Torquil shrugged.

'Why break the habit of a lifetime?'

'We've got another star lined up,' Wade continued. 'This one's English. They usually go to three marriages then give up the whole idea as a bad job,' he added slyly. 'Unfortunately he can't start filming until spring, maybe even early-summer, so we've got a big programme gap in the drama department.'

Jude's stomach fluttered with excitement. Even though she knew what was coming it was still exciting to hear it from Wade's own lips.

'We've got an entire film crew ready to roll. What do we do? Tell them to go home or tell them to shoot *Secrets*?'

It was impossible for Jude to hide her delirious excitement.

'Shoot *Secrets*,' she said, her face radiant with pleasure.

'But is it that simple, Jude?' Wade asked, looking her straight in the face. 'Can *you* deliver?' Torquil, Rose and Wade all looked at her as if she held the aces. 'I don't have time or money for another bum deal. If the BBC commissions your book it has got to work. I'll need a full treatment for the series by the end of the week, a ninety-minute pilot script by the middle of August so that my production manager and location manager can have at least a month's preparation time. We'll need a pilot programme in the can by the end of September. I'll have to recast, find another director, an assistant director and an assistant producer. All these things are possible – but I need some straight talking from you, Jude.'

She nodded. She'd had time to think about this, thanks to Rose. But the timing was really tight.

'Have you any experience of putting together a treatment for a full-blown, major television series?' he asked.

'No. Radio, yes. I've written dozens of treatments. I appreciate there's a big difference but I can assure you, I have no problems with writing.'

Wade looked at her.

'I believe that,' he answered, and paused thoughtfully.

Jude wondered what was coming next. If she'd been in his shoes she'd have ditched the idea, smiled sweetly and legged it. Wade, however, was prepared to take a flyer.

'All right, Jude. We'll commission the treatment right away. Have you an agent?' he asked.

'No.'

'Get one.'

'I'll try,' she said, wondering how she'd ever find the time to get the agent they all so desperately wanted her to have.

Their second course arrived but nobody was interested in

food. Jude's throat was drying up and she ordered another Spritzer, wishing she could have a glass of wine but not daring to. She needed to be on the ball throughout the whole of this meeting.

'We're talking about a six-parter, Jude. Shooting would have to start in October. When does the Michaelmas term usually begin in Cambridge?'

'Around the fourth,' she answered.

'Good. We'll pick up all the atmosphere. We'll need permission to film in the colleges,' he added thoughtfully.

'In Cambridge?' she asked, nervously.

He looked at her, surprised.

'Where else? The book's set there.'

Jude managed to bluff her way out.

'I just wondered whether it would be Oxford or Cambridge.'

She could have kicked herself for reacting so stupidly. If this series were to take off she'd have to stop asking dumb questions.

'Once you start writing the treatment you're bound to have a lot of questions that'll need answering fast. Phone me on my direct line, any time,' he said, handing over his card.

The conversation spilled over into more general topics. Hibbs and the latest gossip in the publishing world, BBC politics, Jude's guests on last week's Forum, and the Frankfurt Book Fair. By two-thirty the meeting was over and Jude was sitting in the back seat of Torquil's chauffeur-driven Mercedes, heading back to Broadcasting House.

'Matt's a great man and an excellent producer. He'll help you all the way, Jude.' Torquil paused and looked at her. 'You've got to be absolutely sure you can meet his deadline. No bullshit.'

She nodded. 'Of course.'

'It's a tight turnaround, even for Superwoman,' he added.

'I can do the treatment by Friday, that's not a problem. Writing a pilot script by the middle of August is manageable,

but if it comes to writing five more scripts and working full-time, then I'll be pushing it.'

Rose, who'd been very quiet most of lunchtime, taking notes and listening intently, suddenly said, 'You could always co-write the series with an experienced freelance writer. The Beeb have hundreds on their books. Good ones too.'

Jude shook her head.

'I don't like the idea of sitting down, cold, and trying to write a series with somebody I've never met. What if I don't like them?'

'Get somebody else?' Rose suggested.

'But there isn't time for that,' Jude said. 'Anyway, I'd like to try and write the series myself.'

They dropped her off at Broadcasting House where she tried to make up for lost time by working until 8.30. She arrived home late and the food in the oven was so shrivelled up she didn't even recognise it. She settled for a cheese sandwich and a large gin and tonic. Sitting in the corner of their huge comfy sofa in the lounge, Jude sipped her drink and went through the day. She could realistically meet Wade's demands, up until the pilot programme stage, but after that what the hell was she going to do? How could she hold down her job and maintain Forum's high standard if she was knocking out one ninety-minute pilot script, and five one-hour long television scripts? The question instantly begged another. How could she do both these things and keep David happy? Clearly she couldn't do all three, not without a divorce or a nervous breakdown.

Sipping her gin, she reasoned there were two stages to be got through, the preliminary and the long-term. The preliminary started right now and would be exhausting but manageable. If it got through its pilot stage and the series was commissioned then something would have to give. Maybe she could take a couple of months' leave from Broadcasting House. After all, script-writing a major television series could only enhance her media career. Further down the line, when

she knew the upshot of all the discussions with Wade, she could discuss the possibility of a long leave with her boss at Broadcasting House. They'd have to look for a temporary presenter, hopefully one who suited her as well as the programme organisers. Forum was her baby. No way was she keen to dump it for the glitzy-bright, shifting world of television.

Another thought entered her head. If she did end up writing the scripts and working through the shoot, she wouldn't be able to meet up with David in California. Much more ominous was the knowledge that he would, quite rightly, insist that if she could take leave to write a television series, she could certainly take leave to have his baby. All her previous arguments would be blown right out of the window.

She sighed as she drained her glass. So far all of this was hypothetical, but if *Secrets* were televised she would definitely have to say yes to David at Christmas. One thing was now crystal clear in Jude's mind. She wouldn't mention a word about the series to David, at least not for the moment. There was a fifty percent chance that Wade would chuck the whole idea down the pan, so why bother David with something that might never happen?

The following morning she told him she'd be staying in London until the end of the week.

'I'm snowed under with work,' she said, grateful that her explanation was completely truthful.

David was used to her staying at Claudia's during a particularly busy week.

'That's OK, sweetheart. I've a lot to do myself. We'll have a peaceful weekend together.'

'That's a promise,' she assured him.

When Jude got into her office she rearranged her diary, shifting non-urgent appointments to the following week. She then concentrated only on that week's Forum, phoning her

guests, reading whatever publications they'd sent in to her, checking her notes then writing Friday's script. She worked till late but by the time she left BH the script was on Sandra's desk, waiting to be typed up by her the following day. Jude now had what was left of the evening, and all of the next day and night to write a treatment for Wade. Both Gareth and Sandra knew she'd be in Notting Hill and they had Claudia's phone number in case of emergency.

Claudia had a ground-floor flat in a wide street just past the tube station. The rooms were enormous with high ceilings, huge bay windows and marble fireplaces in every one. It had been Claudia's mother's pied à terre in London, during her glamorous society days, but now it belonged to her daughter. Claudia had painted the flat in earth colours, mostly terracotta, cream, olive and a deep blue. She'd chosen rich tapestry curtain fabric and scattered jewel-coloured oriental rugs on the polished oak floor. It was wonderfully comfortable, particularly after a long hard day. Jude sank gratefully into the deep sofa and sniffed hungrily.

'Do I smell food?' she asked.

'Curried prawns and saffron rice, made by Marks and Sparks, cooked to perfection by *moi*.'

'Thanks, Claude,' said Jude kicking off her shoes. 'I brought some lagers.'

'One can's your limit, girl, then it's down to business.'

They talked about Claudia's work while they ate. She was shortly leaving for India, to make a programme for Channel 4 on a radical young writer in New Delhi.

'She sounds brilliant,' Claudia enthused. 'Her latest book's sweeping the country and it's going to make her very rich. I want to meet her before she leaves the old way of life and takes up the new, which is guaranteed to destroy her.' She drank some lager and changed the subject. 'Guess what?' From years of experience Jude knew exactly what was coming next.

'Jonathan's coming back while you're away in India?' she

said. Claudia nodded. 'Well, at least you're past the point of killing yourself,' Jude added cheerfully.

'But I am on the point of killing *him* the bastard! I'm convinced he does it on purpose.'

Jude had been convinced of that for years but didn't say anything that would further provoke Claudia.

'What's he coming for anyway?'

'The usual. He's directing some BBC drama.'

They both stared at each other.

'Oh, no!' Jude gasped, almost spilling her lager on Claudia's expensive sofa.

'Anyway, what would be so wrong with Jonathan directing your series? He's brilliant.'

'I'm sure he is,' Jude quickly agreed. 'But familiarity breeds contempt and friends working together is often a bad move.'

'Well, don't worry about it. Jonathan's Finland-bound, so relax.'

When the supper things were cleared away the two of them sat either end of the sofa, pens poised.

'Are you sure you don't mind doing this?' Jude asked.

'No, I told you earlier, it's fun. Beats watching News at Ten any night.'

They went through Jude's photocopied manuscript, blocking the book into sections that could then be treated as six individual parts. Claudia, who knew Cambridge like the back of her hand, was full of clever ideas and subtle links. About twelve thirty Jude said, 'Go to bed now, Claude. I can do the rest on my own.'

'No,' Claudia answered, as she poured strong black coffee into their empty cups. 'We'll finish a breakdown of each part, then I'll go to bed.' They finished at four in the morning, just as it was getting light. Bleary eyed, they cleaned their teeth in the bathroom together.

'What time have you to get up?' Jude asked.

'I've a meeting with a guy from Granada TV at ten so I'll leave here about nine.'

'Wake me up before you go,' Jude asked. 'And, thank you, Claude,' she said, hugging her tight.

'Say that when I wake you at eight-thirty,' said Claudia with a loud yawn.

She woke Jude with a pot of tea.

'Drink this, get up and have a shower. The Apple's switched on and waiting. I want your treatment on my desk when I get back tonight. No excuses!'

Jude sat up in the sofa bed and drank her Darjeeling, staring around the sitting room. There were framed photographs dotted all around. Lots of Claudia and Jonathan at Cambridge, about the time Jude had first met them. Suddenly she spotted a photograph of all of them, taken on that sunny day they'd punted down to Grantchester. Sitting on the bank, smiling at the total stranger who'd taken the photograph, they all looked so young and vibrant with hope. Five years was a long time. How much had they all changed, forging new careers, new relationships, new lives?

Looking along the line of faces, Jude carefully examined their eyes. David's were pale and a little shy. That look had gone, replaced by a newly confident expression. Claudia's wonderful eyes looked clear and challenging, just as they still were; Jonathan's dark and broodingly powerful. And Jude's? She carefully studied the eyes of the girl she was five years ago. Silver light, large and dreaming, she looked happy but fragile. The way she'd felt after Lucius's rejection. Goodness, that was a lifetime ago! Jude had barely given him a thought in years, she could hardly recall the colour of his eyes. How strangely far away he seemed now.

Finishing her tea, she had a quick shower then set to work on Claudia's Apple computer. She hardly stopped all day and when Claudia came home at eight o'clock, with fish and chips for supper, Jude had finished the first draft. They ate quickly then went through it together, correcting and tightening it. Two hours later it was finished and Jude was faced with a big re-write.

'I'm bowing out of this one,' Claude yawned. 'I've got an early start in the studio tomorrow. Good night, Jude.'

In the still of the night she completed the final draft and at eight-thirty the following morning met Rose outside Hibbs' office.

'It's in your hands now,' she said, grey with fatigue.

'Not for long. I'll courier it over to the Television Centre right away.'

'Speak to you later,' Jude said. 'I've got a live programme due out in just over an hour.'

Wade read Jude's treatment and phoned her at home that weekend.

'It's got your characteristic style, Jude. We're going for a pilot. Can you make it?'

Without pausing for an instant she replied, 'No problem.'

Later that night she told David.

Chapter Ten

David sat and listened, and didn't say a word until Jude had finished.

'Something else you thought best not to tell me. Isn't your excessive privacy getting to be something of a bad habit?'

Jude looked down at her feet. This was going to be much worse than she'd thought.

'Did you think the "magic" would go away if you told me?' he asked, mockingly emphasising the word she'd used when she'd told him about writing *Secrets*.

'Stop being so bloody mean, David,' she said, stung by his unkindness.

'Well, how do you think I feel, Jude? Left out of half your life.'

'It isn't half my life, as you so melodramatically put it. It was a flyer. There was every chance it wouldn't come off.'

'But it has,' he added sourly. 'You're a media success. It's always been inevitable that you'd go from radio to television. I just didn't think it would be quite so quick as this,' he muttered under his breath.

'Can we keep it in perspective? Right now the BBC are only talking about making a pilot programme. That's all.'

'Yes, and then they'll do the pilot, then they'll make the series.' He stopped short as a new thought occurred to him. 'When?' he asked sharply.

'When what?' she asked.

'When will they start shooting.'

'They'll make the pilot as soon as possible. Probably in September – '

'The series,' he interrupted impatiently.

'In the autumn – if it goes through,' she added cautiously.

'So it's goodbye to our holiday in California.'

'If they did make the series, it would be goodbye to our holiday.'

'Stop qualifying everything I say, Jude,' he snapped.

She ignored his bad mood and carried on. 'If they did make the series,' she repeated, 'Wade has already told me I'd have to be around throughout the shoot for last minute rewrites.'

'What about Forum?' he asked pointedly.

Jude knew exactly what he was thinking but answered unwaveringly: 'I'd have to take time off.'

He nodded, his eyes hard and angry.

'And where would they film your series?' he asked, determined to make this as difficult as possible.

'Here, in Cambridge – not King's,' she added, thinking how pathetic she sounded.

'Not King's,' David sneered. 'What the fuck difference does it make, Jude? Your pervy couple will be filmed everywhere but King's. Don't worry though, nobody in England with an IQ of less than ten will ever twig that the book is written about Cambridge and the university.'

'I'm confused,' she said, speaking as coldly as he was. 'First, the idea of my writing a book was a bit of a shock but quite gratifying – once the faculty had approved it,' she added sarcastically. 'As long as the wife's not too successful and the book just gathers dust on the back shelves of the local library, that's fine. If it should take off into a major television series, then it's a disaster.' She quickly brushed the tears from her eyes and continued. 'Am I the only person in history who's ever written about this city and its university?'

'It's the way you've written about it,' he fumed.

Jude stared at him, astonished.

'But you told me it was good,' she reminded him.

'Yes, I did, but I've flicked through the manuscript a couple

of times since I first read it.' Jude could imagine him, in her study, anxiously rereading her book while she was out at work. 'And it is mocking in places.'

'It's mocking and loving,' she corrected him. 'The traditions here are so archaic they're funny at times. Come on, David, you've said that often enough.'

He stood with his back to her, staring moodily out of the window.

'Yes, to you, in private. It doesn't give you the right to take the piss out of it on two hundred and twenty pages. Anybody who reads your book will be convinced this place is bristling with ivory towers, stuffed full of old queens buggering each other during tutorials.' If David hadn't been so angry his description would have been funny.

'I'm not Claude and I haven't got a vendetta against the university,' she answered calmly. 'Cambridge is in a time-warp of odd, outdated traditions, which I, or anybody else, can smile at. It's only a place, not a religion.'

David dropped his head and sighed deeply.

'For Christ's sake, Jude. What's happening to us?'

She moved over to stand beside him.

'Darling,' she murmured, 'don't turn it into a tragedy. After all,' she added, returning to her original theme, 'it might never happen.'

'It fucking will happen, Jude, and you know it.'

August set in, hot and unpleasant. David remained cold and distant even though, this time, Jude wrote the script right under his nose. She flamboyantly left pages of it around the house, hoping he'd read it and talk to her about it. He didn't read anything or talk to her. He behaved as if *Secrets* was simply not happening. Ironically the more he ignored the book's existence, the closer it came to reality. Publication date was scheduled for 1 October. Jude had a roughed-up advance copy, complete with stunning cover. It was a photograph showing Robert and Duncan under a

carved gothic window, berobed in academic regalia, including mortar boards, holding hands and smiling beatifically. Jude too had been photographed, for publicity and promotional purposes. Her shots were all taken in Cambridge – Jude walking in Clare College garden, Jude talking to a college porter on King's Parade, Jude in the Wren library at Trinity College, Jude outside the Senate House and by the gates of Jesus College, Jude drifting up the Cam, sipping champagne in a punt.

'We won't use all of them,' Rose assured her. 'Just the best to promote the big display.'

The most glamorous picture was a glitzy mug-shot of Jude which would go on the back cover, with a brief biography underneath.

With the atmosphere so oppressive at home, she found it harder and harder to get into her first script.

'It won't flow,' she wailed to Claudia over the phone.

'Come on, Jude. Get a grip,' Claudia instructed, adding realistically, 'You've written more scripts than most people have eaten sushi. What's the problem?'

'It's for television, that's what's the problem,' she admitted. 'I can do radio but telly makes me nervous.'

'That's because it's new. It's got to be easier than radio, Jude. Think about it. You can at least *see* your characters!'

'Exactly,' she cried. 'I can see them and they're all standing in a big awkward lump. Not moving or talking, just rooted to the spot. No movement, no energy, nothing.' She felt as frustrated as a child on the edge of tears. 'I can't get the dialogue going. Shit, I should've stuck to what I know.'

'What - sheep shearing in Keswick?'

Instead of crying, Jude burst out laughing.

'Oh, Claude. What am I going to do?'

'It's a big jump and you're panicking. Right?'

'Not quite,' Jude admitted. 'But there's David too. He's really angry, Claude.'

Claudia wisely bit back any comment, simply saying, 'That's why you can't write. You don't want to upset David.'

'Probably.'

'Then move your place of work. If you can't write the script at home, write it on the train. Think positive. You've written at least a hundred scripts on the train, and a full-length novel. Maybe you should set up an office on the London to Inverness Inter-City,' she teased.

It was the simplest piece of advice but it worked like magic. The writing block Jude had at home faded away on the 7.20 to Liverpool Street station. Over the space of a week she completed her first draft and asked Wade for an extension to her deadline date.

'I'd like the weekend to do the final draft,' she told him.

'OK,' he agreed. 'But come hell or high water, I need that script by nine o'clock Monday morning.'

'Fine,' Jude assured him, wondering how she'd work at home with David so grumpy. He solved the problem by announcing that he was going to Venice for the weekend. He explained he needed to pick up books and documents for his trip to the States, and photocopy an old manuscript that couldn't be removed from the university library. Jude waited with bated breath, convinced he'd ask her to go too, worried sick over what excuse she'd give for turning him down. She waited all night, then realised that she wasn't a part of his plan. Her relief gave way to anxiety and when she got home from work, late on Friday night, David was gone. The house was cold and empty and Jude felt lonely for the first time in the whole of her married life. David had dramatically made his point - *Secrets* was pulling them apart. Nevertheless, Jude still managed to finish the pilot script and have it on Wade's desk by nine o'clock on Monday morning.

The script needed a couple of rewrites but they were done by the script editor once Jude, with the director and Wade himself, had thrashed out the technicalities. Casting for the

series was well underway. The casting director's coup so far had been commissioning Jeremy Irons to play the part of the urbane but disapproving university Vice Chancellor. Finding the right actors for the parts of the two main characters, Jude's gay lovers, Robert and Duncan, was more difficult than she could ever have imagined. She sat through several auditions and began to wonder if anybody would fit the bill. Every little detail mattered. Whether they were too tall or too short; too fat or too thin; too young or too old; too bald or too hairy. A sensitive-looking actor could make the part too camp, a physical one came over too butch. Eventually they cast Duncan, settling for Tom, an unknown actor in his mid-thirties with a soft, educated voice, intelligent eyes and a nervous disposition. Jude found the actor for Robert by accident. She and Rose were at the Barbican watching *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when the young Irish actor playing Lysander walked on.

'That's him,' Jude hissed as the lean young man with a brooding, angry sexuality swaggered across the stage in leggings and a black velvet tabard. At the interval Jude went backstage and got his card – Sean Reagan. He auditioned for the part the next week and was given it on the spot.

'Things are looking good,' Wade said, but he spoke too soon. The following day his director broke her leg. Jude was very anxious about who'd now be directing her script. It could go badly wrong in the hands of an unsuitable person and turn into the sort of drama David predicted – ivory-towered colleges, packed full of raging old queens. She needed an intelligent director, one who could balance out the humour with the tenderness of her characters, preferably one who knew Cambridge and its university traditions. She finally phoned Wade and expressed her fears.

'Jude, don't you think I've thought of those things too?' he asked. 'It's vital we find the right director, for your sake as well as mine. Trust me, I think I might have just the person we need.'

Jude sighed with relief and left the matter in his capable hands. She had more than enough to do right now producing Forum, which had been pushed into second place recently. Fortunately she had Gareth and Sandra to help her out but knew that, if the pilot was approved and the series went ahead, she'd have to do some serious talking with her boss about taking a long leave of absence.

A few days later Wade phoned, clearly very pleased with himself.

'I've nailed the new director,' he announced.

'Is he good?' Jude asked.

'The best,' came back the answer. 'It took a bit of wheeling and dealing. He's supposedly only with the Beeb for six months, to do another project altogether. I persuaded his producer to let him direct *Secrets* first and move on to the next project in February. It might be March if the editing and dubbing gets tricky. Let's hope it doesn't, for their sake,' he added gleefully.

Jude sighed with relief. Her series was in the hands of a real professional. Now she could really relax and enjoy it.

On the Sunday night before they started filming the pilot programme Hibbs and the BBC threw a glitzy supper party at Trinity College. Over two hundred guests turned up, from the world of publishing, radio, television, theatre and the university, plus the entire cast and crew. Jude was relieved and surprised that David had agreed to come. She'd expected him to refuse point blank but he seemed keen to be there. The atmosphere at home had improved since his return from Venice but they hadn't gone back to their old easy ways. They were polite and respectful but guarded, so his sudden enthusiasm for attending the party took her completely by surprise. As Jude soaked in the bath David showered, chatting brightly from inside the steamy cubicle.

'The Beeb have made a good job of inviting all the colleges,' he said, impressed. 'All the right people have got an invite. It should be quite a bash.'

She didn't tell him she'd given Wade's secretary a list of university and college representatives that she'd drawn up herself. Instead she listened astonished, grateful that he couldn't see her face. Was he suddenly happy because his friends and colleagues were approving or was he looking forward to introducing his successful wife to the university hierarchy? She didn't dare ask; neither answer would have been pleasant to hear, and the last thing she wanted tonight was another row. His change of mood was a relief but nevertheless disturbed her.

She took great care dressing for the party. It was a soft September evening but by eight o'clock it would be going dark and quite chilly. Drinks would be on the college lawn to start with, by the river, then guests would move into Trinity dining hall for a buffet supper. Jude desperately wanted to wear her silver knitted dress from Oasis but needed something over her shoulders for the first part of the evening. She finally matched the new dress with an old dark blue velvet jacket cut in a Regency style, with tight, fitted sleeves and puffed shoulders. Her long thick hair cluttered the elegant line of the collar so she swept it up and wore large silver ear-rings and a chunky silver necklace. She finished the outfit with new black suede shoes and an elegant black suede clasp purse.

'You look like the writer of a best-seller,' David teased when she swanned out of the bedroom.

Jude kissed him, grateful for his light-hearted mood.

'Let's enjoy ourselves.'

Hand in hand they walked under the avenue of lime trees into Trinity where Jude suddenly stopped and shivered, as if somebody had walked over her grave.

'David, I'm scared.'

He squeezed her hand tight and smiled.

'Don't be, Jude,' he answered. 'It'll be a night to remember.'

After champagne on the college lawn the light quickly faded and the evening grew chill. The guests made their way

through the lovely Wren court into Trinity dining hall where they were served salmon, Beef Wellington, English cheeses and blackberry tart. Jude hardly tasted a thing. There were so many people to meet and introduce, so many stars and celebrities, so many faces to remember. Torquil, Rose and Wade had got to know some of the university members but not all. Jude's first task was to make sure everybody met the people they needed to. Rose helped her, and the two of them criss-crossed the room, bringing different groups together. All the time Jude was self-consciously aware of her own photograph, smiling out from half a dozen preview book displays dotted around the hall.

After the first course she anxiously scoured the room for Claudia who'd promised to come, probably with Jonathan.

'If he turns up at the weekend I'm going to take him to my bed and keep him there until I've had my way with him,' she'd told Jude over the phone. 'Every possible way with him,' she'd added lasciviously. 'So don't expect me to phone you. I'll come to the bash – if I can walk,' she finished wickedly.

Jude was just beginning to think that Claude wasn't coming when she spotted her, walking elegantly through the crowd. Her silver hair flashed, her eyes were bright and laughing, her dress stunning crushed black silk, long and sexy, slit from heel to thigh showing a vast expanse of slender bronzed leg. When Claudia reached Jude she threw the bunch of white lilies she was carrying into her arms.

'This is wonderful,' Claudia cried, her beautiful face radiant with happiness. 'Jonathan's here . . .' She looked behind but he was gone. 'Never mind, he'll turn up. Now come on, introduce me!'

Jude tried but it was pointless. Claudia knew everybody, so she left her to get on with it. She was just about to return to the Vice Chancellor who was chatting with Jeremy Irons when she felt a hand on her arm. Jude turned and looked straight into Jonathan's face. Five years ago she'd left him, sleeping

in her bed with a soft smile on his lips. The smile was still there, and the same brooding, dark, intense eyes bored into hers right now.

'Hi, Jude,' he murmured, and bent to kiss her lightly on the cheek. She stood transfixed as he leant over her. The sweet, clean smell of his body took her breath away. Jonathan in his thirties was stunning. His hair was longer than was fashionable but romantic against the darkness of his eyes and the golden glow of his tanned skin. New lines added determination to his already commanding face, as did the firmness of his mouth and the strong set of his jaw. His body was harder too. Well-worked, Jude thought, as she noticed the broadness of his chest and shoulders.

'You look wonderful,' he murmured.

He had dreamt of this woman for five years and now here she was, standing before him in a glittering dress, more beautiful than ever. He knew every inch of her, the most intimate lines of her body, the smell and the taste of her. The pink of her nipples and the tilt of her breast, the silk of her skin, the slope of her back. He adored her. Years ago he'd sublimated his passion, before it ruined his life. Jude had been confined to his dreams – dreams he'd wake up from, drenched in a sweat of delight, crying out her name.

When he heard that she had married David, Jonathan gave up all hope. He avoided Claudia whom he sensed knew, though he had never told her. He stayed out of the country for over a year and only returned to do some contract work at the BBC. When he did eventually meet up with Claudia he was nervous about starting up their relationship again. She had no such preoccupations. Nothing was going to stop her getting him into her bed. At first he was reluctant but then made love to her like a wild animal. When he slept it was badly and he woke up beside Claudia, moaning Jude's name. As the years rolled by Jonathan's radical thoughts on marriage and partnerships offered the most perfect, politically correct smoke screen. He never

wanted to live with any woman except Jude, and she was somebody else's.

The deeper his love for her grew, the more Jonathan despised David. He never communicated with him but heard of his smooth, inevitable ascent into academia and blazed with anger. Why drag brilliant Jude into his world, fetid and as dull as fen ditch water?

Feasting his eyes on her now he realised how foolish he'd been. Jude had her own life and her radiant face reflected it. The years had taken nothing away, only added. He loved her sizzling new confidence and the subtle changes in her face and body. The firmness of her jaw, the lift of her head, the set of her shoulders. There was now a slight hollow in her cheeks which gave a longer swoop to her high cheekbones, emphasising her wonderful eyes. Those eyes, like great pools of brimming silver light. How often had he dreamt of them? And that glorious dark gold hair. Jonathan ached to snatch the clip that pinned it up and run his hands through the thick, fragrant drifts. He suddenly realised Jude was talking to him and he hadn't heard a word.

'I'm sorry,' he muttered.

'I said, do you still hate Cambridge?'

'No, not any more,' he answered.

'Why not?' she asked.

'You're here,' he whispered.

Suddenly Wade appeared beside them, with Rose, Claudia and Torquil.

'God, trying to find anybody in this place is a route march,' he said. 'Still, I see you two have introduced yourselves.'

'We already know each other,' Jude explained.

Wade looked at Jonathan, surprised. 'Really? You didn't say.'

'It was a long time ago,' Jude quickly added.

'Well, in that case, Jude,' Wade beamed, completely unaware of the bomb he was about to drop, 'you'll be pleased to hear Jonathan's your new director.'

Jude stared from Jonathan to Wade and the glass she was holding in her hand slipped and crashed to the floor. Red wine splashed on everybody's shoes and legs but at least they were looking at the floor, and not at Jude's bright pink face.

'I'm so sorry,' she gasped. 'I had no idea . . .' Words just failed her and she gave up trying.

Claudia, who was never at a loss for words, looked at Jonathan. 'You never said.'

'I hadn't a chance. There's been little opportunity to talk.' Jonathan emphasised the word 'talk'.

'I've been talking to Jonathan about the project for some time,' Wade volunteered in his usual forthcoming manner. 'He went for it after he'd read your pilot script, Jude. He's the best English director around,' he added proudly.

'When he's around,' Claudia muttered.

'Funny that you two should turn out to be old friends,' said Wade, clearly tickled.

'What a coincidence,' Claudia mocked.

It was clever Rose who saved the day. Spotting a big row about to blow up, right there in their faces, she said, 'Who's ready for the next course? The beef looks delicious.'

Wade immediately set off, taking Jonathan with him. 'Come on, there're a few people I need to introduce you to.'

Jude was still standing, rooted to the spot, watching one of the college waiters sweep up the broken glass around her feet.

'Why don't you move?' Claudia asked, as she took her arm and pulled her sideways.

Why Jonathan? Jude kept thinking. There were millions of directors in the world, why *him*? Claudia broke into her raging thoughts.

'Do you want to talk about it?' she asked.

Jude nodded. She was sick of lying.

'We made love one night, before I was married. Nobody knew, not even David.'

'I knew.'

'He told you?' Jude gasped.

'I should be so lucky. It was about five years ago, right?'

'Yes.'

'I thought it was all over with him and me. He wouldn't write to me, or speak to me on the phone. He never came to England that year.' She searched Jude's face. 'I guess he was giving me the same treatment he was getting from you? When he did come to London, to work, I waylaid him outside his office at the BBC. I got him drunk and tried to seduce him. At first he wouldn't fuck me then he went crazy. We made love all night and then he slept. When he woke, he was crying out your name. I didn't need to be a Freudian analyst to work that one out.' Jude blushed scarlet with shame and embarrassment. 'It took a long time but he got over you. I wonder if he could do it a second time?'

Jude's mouth was dry. She took another glass of wine and drank half of it.

'I wanted to tell you so much. I kept trying. On the phone, face to face, I even wrote letters to you which I burnt. I couldn't do it, Claude. The words wouldn't come out. I was frightened of losing you. I was disgusted with myself, terrified of hurting David and so angry with Jonathan.' Tears rolled down her face as she saw the hurt in Claudia's knowing green eyes. 'I'm so, so sorry,' she finished lamely.

'Jude, Jonathan's slept with dozens of women. It's nice I respect one of them.'

She hadn't meant to make a joke but when the two of them looked at each other they smiled, slowly to start with before they laughed and reached out for one another.

David walked up and said, 'What is this? A consciousness raising experience?'

'Abso-fucking lutely,' Claudia cried, taking his glass and emptying it. 'Have you met Jonathan yet, or are you as busy avoiding him as he is avoiding you?'

She swanned off, throwing her arms around people, kissing

and chatting. Bright and dazzlingly beautiful, she was an actress par excellence when it came to hiding her real feelings.

'Shit!' David exclaimed, turning to Jude. 'I've just heard Jonathan's directing your series. You didn't tell me, or was that you "not wanting to bother me with something that might not happen" again?'

Jude ignored his sarcasm and said, 'I had no idea. Wade's just told me. I suppose it's good,' she added cautiously.

'It's an excellent choice,' David answered honestly. 'Jonathan's a brilliant director, but thank Christ I won't be around when he's filming the series. He's been waiting for something like this for years. A big chance to slag off everything and everybody he loathes in Cambridge. It's perfect that one of his old university pals comes up with the idea and hands it to him, smack on a plate. Well done, Jude.'

She was relieved to see his attention caught by a strikingly pretty girl, waving to him from the doorway.

'Victoria!' he called over the people in front of him.

Smiling with relief, her eyes wide with excitement, the girl waved and headed straight towards David. Intrigued Jude watched, convinced that the girl was going to throw her arms around him and kiss him. When she reached his side he grasped her hand and shook it, for too long, saying, 'Victoria, meet my wife, Jude.' The two women shook hands as David said, 'Victoria's one of my third-year research students. Just back from Venice.'

Jude smiled.

'Pleased to meet you, Victoria. How was Venice?'

'Wonderful. David put me in touch with Beata. She let me use the *biblioteca* and I even stayed with her for a few days.'

'Beata!' Jude asked in surprise. How odd David had never mentioned this student. Previously he would have brought special students like her back home for supper. They would have talked about Venice, Beata and the university together.

As if reading her thoughts David quickly said, 'You've been so busy recently,' and taking Victoria by the arm he led her away, saying, 'Must catch up with the news.'

Jude watched them go and shivered down the length of her spine. The evening that had begun so well was slowly turning into a night of dark foreboding. She slipped out of one of the side doors and stepped into the darkened Great Court where a soft autumnal rain was falling. Hearing the splash of the fountain Jude walked towards it, her high-heeled shoes echoing loudly across the empty court. She'd had a one-night stand with her best friend's lover, who was about to walk back into her life, and deceived her husband for five years. Was it any wonder her marriage seemed to be falling apart and David was keeping secrets from her? Goodness only knew, she'd kept enough from him over the last six months.

'Oh, God,' she groaned as she leant over the edge of the fountain and felt the soft splish splash of falling water on her face.

'Right on,' a voice answered from the other side of the fountain. Jude jumped as a man rose to his feet and smiled at her.

'Robert,' she cried with relief when she saw his face in the light.

'Sean Reagan, actually,' he answered in his harsh Belfast accent.

'I'm sorry,' she apologised. 'I'm mixing fiction with fact all the time these days.'

'One of the hazards of the job, I'd say,' he said, offering her the joint he was smoking. Jude shook her head.

'No thanks. I've got to keep my head clear for the speeches.'

He inhaled deeply and blew smoke slowly into the misty night.

'Your Robert's a hard man, I'm telling you. Intellectual, radical and gay. You're expecting a lot, Jude,' he said, smiling dreamily.

'I know, but you can do it, Sean.'

'Well. I'm getting my head around him these days. He's complex though and fucking angry. Did he know he was gay before he met Duncan?'

'Yes. Been proud to be gay for years. Not likc Duncan, happy but repressed in his academic life.'

'Studying the classics. The sexy Greeks,' Sean added with a laugh as he wriggled his hips. 'They were into everything, man, woman and beast.'

'Careful, Sean, Duncan's no pervert.'

'Mother-whipped though.'

Jude nodded in agreement.

'Poor bastard's never had a hard on till he meets up with me. A mean, raunchy, political classicist from the University of Belfast.'

'Poor Duncan,' Jude said. 'No wonder he's scared.'

'But he wants it. Fuck the mother and the faculty!' Sean threw the finished joint into the fountain where he watched the red ash splutter and hiss. 'Duncan loves Robert and wants to make their relationship into a marriage, but it won't work. Robert's a wild boy. He'll never settle.'

Jude smiled.

'You've got a real grip on him. I wonder how Tom will play Duncan?'

'Depends on the director. Nice geezer, Jonathan,' Sean added. Jude didn't reply but moodily swished the water in the stone basin. Suddenly she heard somebody calling her name and looked up to see a waiter hurrying across the wet court.

'Sorry to disturb you, Miss Summers, but Mr Wade asked me to find you. They'd like to start the speeches.'

Jude followed him into the dining hall and joined Torquil and Wade at the high table. As she took her chair she was uncomfortably aware of David in the audience, still deep in conversation with the girl, Victoria, and Claudia, rather drunkenly leaning against Jonathan. Torquil went first,

talking generally about publishing then more particularly about television tie-ins and Hibbs' success rate in that area. Just as Jude was beginning to think he was pushing the self-promotion a little bit too far, Torquil turned his attention to her.

'It's a rare pleasure to come across a first book written by an author who instinctively possesses two great skills. One, she can write, and two, she can tell a brilliant story. Hibbs are privileged to welcome Jude Summers on to their list.' A loud round of applause followed, with a few hoots and cheers from Claudia. Jude was immensely relieved when Torquil handed over to Wade who talked about the business of film-making.

'Cambridge is a beautiful city, steeped in its own fascinating history. We at the BBC are deeply privileged that the university has afforded us such wonderful facilities. We have been overwhelmed by the kindness and courtesy shown to us by all the colleges. You'll be pleased to hear,' he added with a twinkling smile, 'that all the college names in the series are fictitious, as are all the characters too.'

There was a low rumble of laughter from around the room as various college members, including David, shared the joke with him. Wade went on to explain how long the filming would take, where it would happen, and then pointed out the various members of the cast, famous and otherwise, dotted about the room.

Jude spoke last, rather hesitantly to start with, but as she got into describing the book her vivacity returned and she finished with warmth and humour. Applause followed then people milled around the high table to say goodbye. David was suddenly at her side, his arm around her waist, taking his bow alongside her, smiling as he was slapped on the back and congratulated on his wife's dazzling success.

'If I see David smile sychophantically one more time at the Vice Chancellor, I think I might just throw up,' Claudia muttered to Jonathan as she headed for the door. 'Bastard! It's Jude's bash and he should back off.'

Jonathan stared at David and felt his belly burn with anger.

'He's enjoying the establishment approval. I wonder what would happen if they changed their minds? They just might, you know, when it's televised.'

Claudia turned to him, shocked.

'Christ! You wouldn't jeopardise Jude's series just to get your own back, would you?'

'How could I?' he reasoned. 'There's not an ounce of malice in Jude's script.'

'Tell that to David,' Claudia said. 'Let's go.'

Getting out wasn't all that easy. The room was full and everybody was heading the same way. Jonathan and Claudia were stopped half a dozen times for a last-minute word with the assistant producer, Wade, the location manager, then friends along the way. When they finally reached the Porters' Lodge Jonathan remembered he'd left his coat and bag in the senior common room.

'Stay here,' he told Claudia. 'I'll only be a minute.'

He ran back across Trinity Great Court, dashed into the darkened common room and grabbed his things from the chair he'd left them on. As he was leaving he heard a low moaning. When he turned he saw a pretty young woman, half naked, lying on a brown leather sofa, with a man on top of her. Embarrassed Jonathan hurried out. It was only when he was halfway across the court he realised he'd known the man.

It was David.

Chapter Eleven

Jude had arranged to take a week off work while the BBC were in Cambridge shooting *Secrets*.

'No problem, Jude,' her boss had assured her when she'd approached him for time off. 'This is something we can all be proud of. It's not every day one of our top presenters gets to write her first book and has it televised by the BBC. Hell, Jude, I'm amazed you're still talking to me.'

She smiled at his joke then asked who'd be taking over while she was away. He came up with his usual suggestion, a man Jude detested. He had a dated approach and a voice like syrup. No way was she rocking the boat right now, but if the pilot led to a commission of the entire series she was definitely going to suggest a stronger presenter. Somebody who could keep Forum on the right track in her absence, and not reconstruct it into a Radio 2 chat show.

It was strange to wake up at 6.30 on Monday morning and not jump out of bed and rush for the train. She lay there, warm and still, listening to the world outside. When David got up she pretended to be asleep, just to enjoy the peace of the morning a little longer. As he made breakfast downstairs she went through the day's schedule that she now knew off by heart. Depending on the weather they'd do the outside filming first, mostly in Magdalene. The main body of the filming would take place in Queens', where Robert was the newly appointed classics don. They'd be shooting in the sixteenth-century dining hall and chapel, the Elizabethan court and the Mathematical bridge over the River Cam. They were using Jesus for Duncan's study rooms and flat, then lots

of random filming around Cambridge – Midsummer Common, Christ's College boathouse, Clare Fellows' Garden, even Paradise Island, the university's private swimming club on the River Cam. Luckily Jonathan remembered most of the places and had come up with a few himself for the location officer. Suddenly the telephone shrilled by the side of the bed. Jude picked it up and was surprised to hear Jonathan's voice.

'Hi, Jude. Sorry to ring so early but I'm in Magdalene, in the garden just by the river. There're a few things I'd like to check with you, now if you can manage it, before the crew turns up and everything gets technical.'

Jude looked at the clock. It was 7.30.

'Give me twenty minutes,' she said and leapt out of bed and into the shower. Ten minutes later she was downstairs, dressed in jeans, sweat shirt and jacket, drinking a cup of coffee.

'There's a piece in here about you,' said David from behind the *Guardian*.

Jude peered over his shoulder and saw a photograph of Torquil and Wade outside Trinity. Her eyes scoured the column.

> 'Jude Summers, Radio 4's thinking man's woman, has further proved her intellectual capabilities by coming up with a first novel that intriguingly blends university politics and homosexuality in a fine cocktail of hilarity and tenderness. The book is superbly written, accurately describing university life and the shock waves that rock Cambridge on the arrival of a brilliant classicist from Belfast. Summers writes with confidence and ease, a natural crafter of good drama, juxtaposing the blossoming of gay love with the arid dryness of academia.'

Jude let out a long sigh of relief. 'He likes it.'

'He would,' David commented. 'He's Reece-Jones's best mate. The guy raves about everything Hibbs puts out.'

'Thanks, David, I feel a whole lot better for that vote of confidence.' She grabbed an apple from the fruit bowl and

headed for the door. 'We're scheduled to finish filming at seven,' she said. 'So I'll be back late.' She hung on, waiting to see if he'd respond.

'Have a nice day,' he replied with mock brightness.

A soft mist was lifting as she cycled down the Backs to Magdalene College. The sky was bright but rain was forecast for the afternoon. There was a freshness in the cool morning air, tinged with the smell of ripe fruit and damp leaves. Magdalene gardens were a riot of autumn dahlias and late roses. Jonathan was in the garden by the river, talking to the first assistant director and his PA.

'Hi, Jude,' he called as she came hurrying down the path. 'I've got a bit of a problem, or I'm anticipating one. You know the bit where Robert first approaches Duncan, in the Fellows' Garden?'

Jude nodded. 'He tries to kiss Duncan.'

'Who legs it then hides in one of the courts and secretly watches Robert,' Jonathan added. 'Well, where does he hide if we shoot it here?'

Jude looked about her and shook her head.

'There isn't anywhere.'

'Shit,' muttered the PA.

'You could try the court at the back,' she suggested. 'There are lots of little paths running off it, with archways that Duncan could duck under.'

'Check it out, Sam,' Jonathan instructed the PA. 'OK, now this section of the script,' he said, standing right beside her and tapping the folder. Normally Jude would have pulled away, embarrassed by the nearness of him. Right now, she was more concerned about her script than her feelings. 'I need a few more words here, Jude. I don't want long-held shots and aching gay music. This isn't *Death In Venice*, after all.'

'The characters are well-cast,' she reminded him. 'They'll bring a lot to the scene.'

'Maybe,' he answered, still not convinced. 'But if it's going droopy I'll want words, fast. Just a few, though. I don't

want to screw up their lines at the eleventh hour. Can you do it?'

She nodded. His request might have sounded vague to somebody else, but not to Jude, who knew the story inside out.

'Sure, but I still think the characters will do it for you,' she insisted.

'Well, let's not take any chances. Their whole relationship, in fact the whole bloody series, hinges on the impact of this first encounter. We don't want to fuck it up, do we, Jude?'

Sam called him on the mobile and Jonathan hurried off, leaving Jude sitting on a wooden bench, munching her apple, as she scrutinised her script. There was no time for further discussion. By the time Jonathan was back the camera crew and cast had arrived and they were busy setting up the first scene.

They started shooting in the court Jude had suggested. The scene opened with Robert, Duncan and several college members leaving an academic board meeting. After some polite chatter on the lawn the group split up and the two men were left alone. When it came to the moment of contact, Jonathan's predictions proved dead right. There were too many long, protracted glances that led to a clumsy awkwardness. They cut and took the scene several times, adding the extra text Jude had written. Sean as Robert quickly came into his character, combining a biting intellectualism with a political hunger that forged his sexuality into something mesmerising. Duncan, both terrified and fascinated by Robert, was drawn to him like a snake to its charmer. Tom, the actor playing Duncan, was much slower in finding his character, nervy and internalised. He'd obviously made some progress in rehearsals but it took a while for him to find the right balance between Robert's animal power and his own conservatism. For Jude, who'd created them, it was amazing to see the transition. Even more astonishing was the way her characters expanded and

developed, taking on subtle nuances that took her totally by surprise.

After a good morning's work they broke for lunch and wandered down the Backs to the location caterers' double decker bus, parked up behind Trinity, conspicuously red against the stately grey of the college.

'I wonder what delights they've cooked up for us today,' Kate the assistant producer said as they clambered in.

'It smells like a mixture of cabbage and brake fluid,' joked Jonathan.

It was in fact, shepherd's pie and rhubarb crumble which they ate as the rain started pitter-pattering loudly on the bus's metallic roof. Kate peered through the steamed-up windows and groaned.

'Shit! It's set in for the day.'

The first assistant director shared her pessimism and rejigged the afternoon schedule, deciding to film in Queens', which was fairly close by and didn't involve too much of an upheaval. It was one of the best decisions he made that week. The rain beating down in Queens' Tudor court lent an angry moodiness to the scene between Robert and the fictitious Master of the College, who was trying to give him the push.

'Brilliant,' Jonathan announced when they cut for tea.

Brilliant you, Jonathan, Jude thought as she watched him chatting with Duncan, taking him through some of the intricacies of the next scene. You really are an intuitively good director.

On a high they worked straight through till the light faded then all wearily made their way to the Anchor for supper and beer. When Jonathan came up and put his hand on Jude's shoulder she turned to him, tired and relaxed, a warmth in her eyes that froze his smile.

'Er, Jude, a quiet word, if you don't mind.'

She followed him to a table away from the noise and laughter.

'It's Tom,' Jonathan said, coming straight to the point. 'The stronger Sean gets playing Robert, the weaker Tom is on Duncan. He just can't get a grip on his character.'

'I know,' Jude replied. 'Duncan might come over soft to start with but he's tough underneath, especially in the area of his work. That's what first turns Robert on. His searing passion for the Greeks.'

'That's it!' Jonathan said, banging the table. 'That's his way in. Talk to him, Jude. Tell him exactly what you've just told me.'

'OK,' she answered, and leaving Jonathan she took Tom into a quiet corner and talked to him for over an hour.

She got home late and the house was dark and empty. Where on earth was David these days? she wondered as she ran a bath. Maybe he was working late, preparing material for the States. They were so out of touch she didn't even know what he planned to do in California. Previously she would have asked him and he would have told her. It was the same with her work. He'd always kept up to date with everything she did, but their married life wasn't like that any more. They were cold and withdrawn all of the time. As Jude towelled herself dry she realised she couldn't wait for him to leave for the States. A long break might do them both a world of good.

Tuesday was a bad day. The main characters were brilliant but the day was fraught with technical difficulties of all kinds. Lighting, sound and camera faults all combined with the teeming rain that put everybody's nerves on edge. By the end of it Jonathan was in a black mood, the sort Jude well remembered from years ago.

'Take it easy,' she whispered to him as he paced up and down waiting for the gaffer to fix a lighting problem that had dogged them all day.

'Jude, the first cuts of this pilot have got to be on Wade's desk by Monday morning and the fucking sparks assistant can't change a bulb!'

She smiled at the inaccuracy of his statement. 'He's probably got a PhD in advanced engineering.'

'So? He still can't change a bulb,' Jonathan fumed.

Suddenly the arc lights flashed on and Jude burst out laughing.

'Eat your heart out, big mouth,' she teased.

Hearing her laughter, so young and infectious, his black mood rolled away. Before he could stop himself, he took her in his arms and hugged her.

'Jude . . .' he whispered. Hearing her sharp gasp he quickly let her go and turned his attention to the camera operator and first assistant director, who were both looking very surprised.

They finished the scene and broke for lunch. Jonathan avoided Jude. He was angry with himself for behaving like a kid on set. He'd determined when he took on the series that he'd keep his feelings under wraps but it was so much harder than he could ever have anticipated. He loved her even more after all these years and she was so very beautiful. He'd started dreaming about her again. On Sunday night, in the hotel with Claudia, he awoke, calling her name. Claudia had sat up in bed, put the light on and told him she knew he'd fucked Jude. The question was did he love her? Jonathan had answered yes. In the morning Claudia had packed her few clothes into a bag and left. Now she was in India and he didn't know when, or if, he'd see her again. Maybe it was time they split. Time Claudia found somebody she could settle down with.

For the next few days Jonathan determined to keep Jude the writer at the forefront of his mind; the woman he kept to his dreams. Wednesday and Thursday's filming went well. The weather improved and when it did rain it was the sort they wanted, moody and autumnal but not too much of it. They did some of the best filming of the week in Paradise Island, the university swimming club on the Cam. It was a soft golden day; willows dipped into the still river, where Robert and

Duncan swam. As they embraced for the first time a pair of wild swans flew overhead. Jude could hardly believe her eyes. Neither could the production designer who said later, 'Fuck me! If somebody had written wild swans into that scene I'd have told them to take a hike. They just appeared like magic – and right on cue.'

'It's a wrap,' the first assistant director called as they finished the final scene.

'Thanks, all. You've been great,' Jonathan added, tired but clearly very pleased.

In the hectic rush of packing up and moving out Jude hardly had a chance to say goodbye to the cast and crew. She never saw Jonathan, who left immediately.

'He's got an early start tomorrow,' Kate told her. 'Editing all the tapes at the TV Centre. He'll be at it all weekend if he's to meet Wade's deadline.'

Feeling tired and rather deflated Jude walked home and found a huge bunch of fragrant white lilies on her doorstep. The card read, 'Here's to your success, Jude. Thanks for a wonderful week. Jonathan.'

David came home, about an hour after Jude, in a foul temper.

'I suppose there's nothing to eat again.'

Jude had defrosted some lamb chops from the freezer and was just about to grill them with lemon and rosemary.

'I thought we were both in need of a good meal,' she said, ignoring his bad mood as she put the meat under the grill and started to cook the rice and vegetables.

David nodded, visibly relieved.

'Shall I light a fire in the lounge?' he asked. 'The house seems so cold these days.'

'Yes, and open some wine,' she added brightly.

It was an unexpectedly peaceful evening. 'Did everything go well?' David asked as they settled in front of the fire.

She could see he was only being polite, so she didn't go into detail. 'Eventually,' she said, and instead of talking about

the filming told him funny stories about the different bursars and porters they'd worked with throughout the week.

'We bumped into your student Victoria on King's Parade the other day,' she mentioned. The smile left David's face and he shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

'Did she enjoy Venice?'

'Loved it, but I don't think she and Beata hit it off.'

'How odd. I would have thought they'd have got on like a house on fire,' Jude said.

'Beata may come over to California while I'm there,' David added. 'The university have offered to pay her air fare if she'll do a week's work with me. It'll be good to have a colleague around, especially if you have to give it a miss.'

Keen to avoid spoiling the relative peace of the evening, Jude nodded. 'How nice.'

'Do you mind if I switch on News at Ten?' he asked, changing the subject.

Jude didn't mind at all. After a week of thinking fast and working hard she was happy to close her eyes and lie in front of the fire. They made love that night, or tried to, but for the first time ever Jude was too dry for David to enter her.

'I'm sorry, I've rushed you,' he said.

'No, I'm just tired,' she answered apologetically.

They both lay in bed, pretending to sleep, and Jude wondered just how long they could go on like this, pretending about absolutely everything.

The following morning she phoned Gareth at Broadcasting House, to check up on Forum.

'Fucking nightmare,' he told her. 'That pillock presenter got right up everybody's nose. I bet the ratings took a nose-dive this week. Did you hear it?'

'I was nowhere near a radio,' she said, guiltily aware that she hadn't even so much as thought of her radio programme.

'I've faxed some stuff to you on next week's guests. You'll have your work cut out, Jude,' Gareth added.

'I'm looking forward to it,' she answered. Working on Forum was like slipping into an old comfortable coat. She knew all its familiar folds and creases, knew exactly the feel and length of it and how to make it work.

'You look happy,' David commented over lunch.

'I am,' she said. 'I've just been going through some Forum material.'

'I don't suppose you heard it on Friday?' he asked.

Jude shook her head.

'Absolute crap. It's not the same without you.'

She smiled at his loyalty. 'Well, I'll be back to commuting first thing Monday morning.'

She spent the afternoon in her neglected garden, trimming and tidying the overgrown flower beds. It was hot and very still, apart from the excited twitter of starlings as they gobbled up elderberries and blackberries. Swallows gathered on the telegraph wires overhead, ready for the long flight south. Jude stood and watched them, swaying on the wires, their tails dipping as they restlessly waited for the call to go. She hated that moment, that day when she suddenly knew something beautiful had gone. It was a little death as the inevitability of winter rolled in.

Jude returned to Broadcasting House first thing Monday morning, to Gareth and Sandra agog for news of her series.

'Do you reckon Wade will go for it?' Gareth asked.

'I've no idea,' Jude answered. 'He'll be watching the first cuts right now.'

Gareth was right. She had a lot of catching up to do but it was fun to be back and the week off had done her good. She had a new zing and energy. At six, just as Jude was about to leave the office, Wade phoned.

'I've seen the first cuts,' he told her. 'Followed by a two-hour meeting this afternoon. And . . .' Jude held her breath '. . . we're unanimous in our decision to go with *Secrets*.' Her hand shook as she gripped the phone tightly and her heart skipped several beats. 'It's brilliant! Cambridge,

the atmosphere, the colleges. The acting is superb, and so's the directing.'

'Is Jonathan available to do the series?'

'He *has* to be. We've got serious interest from ABC in Australia,' Wade said. 'They want to see it right away and if they like what they see, which they will, they'll immediately invest co-production money. Can you have lunch with me tomorrow?' he asked. 'I'll get Jonathan and Kate along too.'

'Certainly,' Jude answered, and put down the phone, not sure whether to laugh or cry.

On the train back to Cambridge she did something she rarely did. She bought a gin and tonic from the station bar and drank it slowly on the train, as she deliberated her plan of action. There'd be no fooling around this time. She would tell David tonight, immediately she walked in the door. After her lunch with Wade tomorrow she'd have an idea of the schedule they'd be working towards, then she'd approach her boss at Broadcasting House for time off. She wouldn't be able to visit David in California, she'd tell him that tonight too. The plain fact was, she wouldn't be able to do anything for the next three months, apart from work on *Secrets*. Then she'd have David's baby.

Jonathan arrived halfway through lunch the following day. Jude, Wade and Kate were deep in conversation when he joined them.

'Did you manage to swing it?' Wade asked.

Jonathan made a distinctly American movement with his hands, which meant, 'Looking good.'

'What?' Jude said.

'Rescheduling the documentary I was contracted to do in January,' he explained, as he sat down and ordered quiche, potato salad and a bottle of still mineral water. 'I figured we stop filming in Cambridge at the beginning of December so that gives me at least six or seven weeks editing and dubbing.

I should make Finland the end of January, just as the thaw sets in.'

'Great,' said Wade, delighted. 'We're on a roll.'

'As long as *you*, madam writer, get those scripts finished in the next few weeks,' Jonathan said, turning the attention to Jude.

'Hold it, we can't rush a genius,' Wade warned.

When they'd finished their meal they went back to his office and drank coffee round a table, thrashing out the logistics of the production schedule.

'OK, Jude. You first. When can you start?' asked Wade, his secretary poised to take notes as they spoke.

Luckily Jude had already worked out her strategy so she was clear and concise. 'I'll ask for ten weeks' leave,' she started.

Jonathan looked concerned. 'Won't that upset your radio programme?'

'Hopefully not, if they get the right kind of presenter to front Forum in my absence.'

'So, assuming you get the leave, when can you hit the key-board, Jude?' Wade pressed.

She had to wrap up everything at Broadcasting House and get David off to America then she'd be free.

'Next week.'

'So you're talking about mid-October?' Kate asked checking her diary.

Jude nodded.

'Kate will be checking everything and keeping us all on schedule,' Wade explained.

'Contact me any time,' said Kate, 'day or night. If you're really stressed I can come to Cambridge for a script conference. We'll have secretaries available to type up the scripts. You just concentrate on the writing, we'll do everything else.'

'We have the programme outlines you did, you know the book backwards, it might just be possible to knock out five

scripts by the end of October.' Ward looked at Jude. 'Am I pushing you too far?'

'I think a script every ten days is more realistic, but I promise to do my best.'

Respecting Jude as a real professional, they all trusted her word.

'Excellent,' he said. 'Right, Jonathan. We'd better book in our film crew for the end of October then we're on schedule to finish filming early-December.'

He nodded. 'You've picked some crappy months for weather. November's really dank in Cambridge.'

'Yeah, but think of the atmosphere,' Wade reminded him. 'All that moody mist and intense longing. Go for it, Jonathan. The Aussies will lap it up, believe me.'

The meeting went on for hours. Jude left them working out timetables and schedules and took a taxi back to Broadcasting House. The first thing she did was call her boss and ask to see him before the end of the day, which was 8.30 in the BBC bar. When Jude told him her good news he was delighted and gave her leave of absence without too much of a fight. Exploiting his good mood Jude suggested a colleague she had in mind to front Forum while she was away. He said he'd give it some thought and Jude got the last train home, the one that stopped at every single station east of Finsbury Park, and staggered into bed at 1.30. She was up late the next day so didn't get a chance to speak to David, but that night she told him her news over supper.

'The series is going ahead,' she announced, looking him straight in the eye. He held her gaze.

'How will you write it if you're working on Forum?'

'I've taken ten weeks' leave,' she told him and braced herself for the worst.

'Ten weeks is a long time, Jude,' he said thoughtfully. 'I hope Forum won't fade away without your input.'

'I'm hoping to get a good presenter in,' she told him. 'Gareth will take care of it, too.'

'But it's your baby, Jude. You might just lose it.'

She shrugged and smiled.

'I want to do this writing, David. It's my big chance.'

'I know.' He sighed heavily. 'So you won't be coming to the States?'

'No. Once the scripts are finished I have to be on hand throughout the filming, for any re-writes or changes. That's why I've taken time off till the beginning of December.'

'I see.' He looked up and she saw the sadness in his eyes. 'Everything's changing, Jude. We're neither of us going to come down in the same places we left off from.'

She quickly covered his hand with hers.

'We've always taken chances, David. That's the way our marriage has grown.'

'But this is a hell of a big one, Jude. Maybe too big.'

The rest of the week flew by. Jude had to finish her Forum script and promote the new presenter – a woman she'd worked with on Woman's Hour had taken maternity leave and was now back, with a hunger. Jude trusted and respected her. She liked her manner and style and best of all she was available. Late on Friday afternoon, after Sandra had gone, Jude cleared her desk at Broadcasting House. Staring at the empty space she felt tears sting the back of her eyes. She'd been in radio for so long it was like home to her, safe, secure and always welcoming. Now she was stepping into the unknown and for the first time she was suddenly frightened. Taking a last look at the office she'd worked in so happily for two years, she walked out and caught the 6.35 home to David.

There was a lot to do before he left for Heathrow on Sunday afternoon. Packing, a farewell drinks party in college, and supper with close friends on Saturday night. Seeing him growing more tense by the minute she volunteered to sort out his packing while he tied up all the loose ends in King's. It was while she was ironing his shirts that Beata phoned.

'Hi, it's Jude,' she cried. 'How are you?'

Beata was odd. Reserved, almost sharp with her.

'Is anything wrong?' Jude asked.

'Oh, no. I just had to sort out a few last-minute arrangements with David before he left.'

'It's great you're meeting up over there,' Jude enthused. 'When are you going?'

'Next week,' Beata answered. 'I have to be there for the start of term.'

'Oh, so soon?' Jude asked, puzzled. 'Are you going for the whole term?'

'Yes, of course. Didn't David tell you?'

'Er, I'd forgotten,' Jude lied, not quite sure why. 'How's Gabriele? He'll miss you while you're away for the term.'

'No, he won't. We split up during the summer.'

What! Why hadn't David told her that too?

'Why?' asked Jude before she could stop herself.

'Lots of things, mostly work. Plus he had an affair with that ghastly student David sent out to me.'

'Victoria?'

'Yes,' came the icy reply 'Please tell David I called. 'Bye Jude.'

On that formal note the line went dead and she was left holding the telephone, extremely puzzled by Beata's manner and David's secrecy.

She didn't have a moment to talk to him about the phone call until they were walking home, arm in arm, after a very boozy dinner party with their friends on Saturday night.

'You didn't mention Beata was working with you for the whole term?'

She felt him stiffen but he said smoothly enough, 'Yes. The university changed their mind and asked her to give a series of lectures.'

'And she's split up with Gabriele. You didn't tell me that either,' she said.

'Blimey, you two really had a chat, didn't you?'

'Not at all. She was distinctly off hand. Especially when I asked about Gabriele. I don't believe for a minute they split up because of that student of yours.'

David quickened his pace and pulled her closer. 'Who knows? Come on, love. I'm freezing.'

They tried to make love that night and this time he was the nervous one. No matter how much Jude tried to arouse him David couldn't get an erection. Frustrated and tired she asked, 'What's wrong?'

David shook his head and turned away from her. 'I'm just tired.'

She knew he was lying. An hour later she wasn't asleep – and neither was he.

She drove him to Heathrow the following day, and waited with him in the airport lounge.

'This is completely unnecessary,' he said, as they sat drinking coffee and watching planes take off down the runway.

'Why? I won't see you for three months.'

'Two and a half,' he corrected her. 'Good luck, love. With everything.' He said it awkwardly as if it were an effort. 'I know I've been a bit of a bastard to live with since you started this writing business.' He fiddled with the biscuit wrappers on his empty plate. 'I've been so jealous, Jude, and angry. I just wanted it all to stop, but it didn't.' He quickly looked up and added, 'I'm not jealous of your success, love, but of what it will do to you. I love you. I want you to be my wife and have my children.'

'I know, David.'

'We'll talk about it at Christmas, as planned,' he said, reminding her of their long-standing arrangement.

'Christmas,' she agreed, grateful that he wasn't pushing for an answer right now.

He clung to her at the check-in gate.

'Jude, I love you,' he whispered.

'I love you too, David,' she murmured. 'Have fun!'

One last wave and he was gone. With tears in her eyes Jude left terminal two and found her car. As she drove back home, through the pouring rain, she knew that the old pattern of their married life had gone forever. With a hard lump in her throat she wondered if the new one would ever replace the happiness they'd lost.

Chapter Twelve

Jude found the first two weeks of that Michaelmas term the quietest of her life. The house was empty and she lived like a hermit in her study, only leaving it for her daily run or to dash to the local Co-op at the end of the day to buy whatever was simplest to cook. Her mind was full of storylines, and the characters she'd created had now taken up residence in her head. She buzzed all day long with their activities and at night her sub-conscious took over, creating even more dramatic scenarios while she slept. The associate producer, Kate, was her life-line.

'Sometimes I feel as if I'm going mad,' Jude confessed to her over the phone one morning. 'My characters are more vivid to me than real life. I even talk out loud to them,' she admitted.

'Don't worry, Jude,' Kate assured her. 'Better bonkers than a writer's block.'

Halfway through Jude's writing month, Kate and Jonathan drove down to Cambridge for a working lunch.

'I'll pick up some pizzas,' Kate insisted. 'So you've no excuse to leave your desk.'

The house, neglected by Jude for weeks, was a tip but luckily it was a perfect golden October afternoon so they sat on the terrace, eating pizza and drinking Coca-Cola

'Just what I needed,' said Jude, finishing off her pizza and hungrily eyeing Jonathan's. 'Are you going to finish that?'

'No, but you are,' he said with a smile as he handed her half of it.

'You need it too, Jude. You've lost a lot of weight.' Barefoot,

in her old faded jeans and skinny T shirt, she looked girlishly young, apart from the dark circles around her eyes.

'I think I have,' she admitted. 'I don't cook now that David's not here. I can't be bothered eating when I'm writing.'

'But you must, Jude,' Kate said, quite shocked. 'We can't have you pegging out with three scripts to go!'

'It'll be great when you lot start filming,' she said. 'I can nip in to the caterers' bus and bum a free lunch every day.'

'That's two weeks and three scripts away,' Kate pointed out. 'You must eat and sleep properly until then.'

'What is this – a conspiracy?' she asked.

'No,' said Jonathan, squeezing her thin arm. 'Somebody's got to keep an eye on you.'

Jude quickly moved away from him, turning her attention to the fourth script which she'd been working on all week.

'Hopefully I'll have this finished by the weekend.'

'Good, but don't rush it,' Kate warned.

'It's difficult not to rush,' Jude burst out, her silver-grey eyes burning with excitement. 'I'm filled with energy. Sometimes I can't write fast enough for the speed of their dialogue. Have you had any thoughts on where we'll shoot Robert's death in the car crash scene?' she asked Jonathan.

'Lots,' he answered. 'It's got to be good, and convincing, otherwise the viewers will think we're taking the easy way out.'

'Keep it cheap,' Kate begged. 'We're already running up to budget. Cambridge is a hell of an expensive location, believe me.'

They worked through the rest of the afternoon but Jonathan was constantly distracted by Jude's home. Memorabilia of her marriage was dotted all over – pictures of her and David's wedding day and endless May Balls, Jude on a Radio Cambridgeshire outside broadcast at Newmarket races, David and Jude on the Rialto in Venice. Every picture told a story and Jonathan was overwhelmingly aware of their happiness. He'd always put Jude into the role of a

slave bride, forced to marry David, forced to live the life he dictated. He'd only to look at the evidence around him to see she was radiantly happy and completely fulfilled.

Jonathan finished the meeting rather moodily then left quickly. When they'd gone Jude returned to her study, strewn with papers and notes, open books and empty coffee cups, and worked on her fourth script till one in the morning, then fell exhausted into bed. She woke at dawn, barely rested but feverishly anxious to return to her writing. A pot of fresh coffee helped her work until eleven then she fell asleep again, this time until four in the afternoon. Day and night, fact and fiction, ceased to exist for Jude. Time was seamless in its passing as she wrote like a demon, possessed by a driving force that expunged everything else from her brain. The filming started in October and on the first day Jude invited Wade, Kate and Jonathan to an early breakfast at her house. They all arrived together and Wade kissed her warmly on both cheeks.

'Jude,' he said, holding her at arm's length. 'You're looking tired.'

'Matthew, I *am* tired,' she exclaimed. 'Now, come on, have some coffee and tell me what you're doing in Cambridge on the first day of the shoot.'

'Got to keep an eye on my director,' he answered jokingly. 'And it's nice to get out occasionally.'

They talked and laughed together as they ate bacon, scrambled eggs and croissants. Jonathan didn't eat much and was rather quiet. After a cup of coffee he stood up and said, 'Thanks for the breakfast, but I've got to dash. There're a few things I've got to check out before the crew set up. See you at ten,' he added to Wade and Kate then left.

'Nerves,' Wade said when Jonathan had gone. 'Brilliant director. We're lucky to have him.' He sipped his coffee then turned to Jude and smiled. 'Now, young lady. What's all this about a new ending?'

* * *

As the film crew got underway, shooting episodes two and three of *Secrets*, Jude stayed in her study, pounding out the final versions of three, four and five. She was too immersed in her writing to think about the filming going on, just along the Backs from her own front door. She kept right away from the cast and crew and they left her in peace. She was quite sure Wade or Kate had warned anybody off visiting her, at least until she'd completed the scripts. When she had typed the last, with the new ending, she stared and stared at the blue screen of her computer. As she printed it out, listening to the friendly whizz and click of her printer, she felt relieved, exhausted and bereft. Leaving the sheets to mount up she went into the bathroom and stared at her face in the mirror. She was white as a sheet, her eyes huge in her thin face, and her hair was long and straggly. She seemed to have been wearing jeans and sweatshirts for over a month.

Walking from room to room she noticed for the first time the clutter she'd created. God only knew when she'd last made the bed. Jude flung open the windows and drank in the damp autumnal air then gasped at the state of her neglected garden below. Where have you been, woman? she asked herself, as if waking from a dream. In another world, was the answer. When she'd written the book on the train she had never been like this. *Secrets*, the book, had been neatly compartmentalised in her brain and hadn't got in the way of anything else. Writing the television series had taken over her mind and her life. Like Frankenstein she'd become both obsessed and possessed by the lives she'd created.

Well, it was over. She'd miss her fictitious characters, but their lives had run their course and she was free again. Free to do what? Sleep? Clean up? Eat? All of those things but first she'd deliver the script then she'd go for a run. She jumped on the bike and pedalled down the Backs to the production office in Trinity College where she left the final script with Jonathan's name on it. Feeling like the weight of the world was rolling off her shoulders, Jude hurried home, peeled off

her jeans and threw them in the dustbin. The symbolic gesture pleased her immeasurably.

She changed into her running clothes and set off for Grantchester Meadows where she ran through damp fields with cows standing knee-deep in rising mist. When she got home she showered, washed her hair and studied her naked body in the full-length mirror. She was thin, especially her arms and thighs, and her hair needed cutting. Still naked, she stripped the bed and remade it, delighting in the fresh crispness of clean white sheets. The sight of the soft, white bed hit Jude like a drug. Suddenly it came up to meet her and she fell on to it and slept the sweetest sleep she'd had in weeks.

She awoke in the dark, with rain falling against the open window, and the telephone ringing. Picking it up she heard Kate's voice.

'Jude, Jonathan's just showed me the final script. It's brilliant.'

She yawned.

'Good. Does that mean I don't have any rewrites?'

'There are a few things,' Kate said in her precise voice. 'But let's not talk about them now.'

'Please, let's not,' Jude begged.

'Come down to the pub and have dinner with us,' Kate suggested.

Jude, who didn't want to be with anybody at all, said, 'Do you mind if I don't? I'm not very good company at the moment.'

'Of course not,' Kate answered. 'Get some rest. Good night.'

Jude put down the phone and slumped back on the bed. The rain outside was comforting but the cold air coming through the open window made her shiver. She got up and closed the window then went downstairs in her dressing gown and fried some eggs. The phone went again. This time it was David, very bright and cheerful.

'Hi, Jude,' he cried. 'How's things?'

'Fine. I've finished,' she answered flatly.

'Great. Why aren't you out celebrating?'

'I'm too tired, and I'm lonely.' Her eyes filled with tears as she realised just how much she missed him. It would have been lovely to have him there, just to lie in bed with and feel his arms around her.

'Sweetheart,' he sounded surprised. 'I thought you'd be whooping it up with the cast and crew.'

'Right now I'm frying two eggs and wondering what to do with myself.'

'Watch telly,' he suggested.

'No. I hate it these days. All I think of is gaffers, focus pullers, key grips and set dressers.'

'Read a book. That always relaxes you.'

'No. It's too much like writing one,' she answered miserably.

'Phone Claude.'

'She's in India.'

'She can't be still interviewing the same writer?'

'No. She took leave and went to walk in the Himalayas,' Jude explained.

'Perhaps that's what you should do, love?'

'What go to the Himalayas?' she said, starting to laugh.

'No, take leave. You're knackered.'

'Tell me about it. I can't take leave because I've already taken leave to work on set throughout the rest of the shoot,' she snapped.

'Hey, don't blame me,' he answered sharply. 'I'd prefer you to be here with me, you know.'

Jude sighed. If only she were. To be out of Cambridge, out of England, for the whole of November. That would be something. She kept her thoughts to herself. She'd made her choice, now she had to live with it.

'I'll be fine once I've caught up with some sleep,' she said, trying to sound cheerful. 'How's Beata?'

'Busy. Sweetheart, I've got to go. Phone you soon 'Bye.'

"Bye.' Jude put down the phone, looked at the congealed eggs on her plate and went back to bed where she slept till eleven the next morning. She was out in the garden, brushing up piles of leaves, when she heard Kate calling to her from the side gate.

'Hi, Jude. Are you in?'

'Yes, come through,' she called.

'Wade's just turned up,' Kate said, rather breathlessly. 'Can you make a script conference tonight at his hotel?'

'Sure.'

'Good. Are you coming over to Clare this morning?'

Jude shook her head.

'I'd like a chance to forget about Duncan and Robert, just for a couple of hours.'

'Well, at least come for lunch in the bus?'

'OK.'

She dressed with care, enjoying the sensation of wearing pretty clothes again. Cream and perfume on her skin felt strangely pleasant. Lipstick, mascara, blusher. As she applied them, nervous as a teenager, she felt the woman in her start to bloom again. Brushing out her hair she began to recognise herself and smiled with relief.

'I'm back,' she said to her reflection.

Having put off meeting everybody she realised how very good it was to see them all again. At one o'clock the bus was packed and steamy. As she passed along the tables people stopped to give her a hug or ask how she was; somebody congratulated her on the scripts. Smiling, Jude made her way to Wade's table.

'It's like watching royalty,' Jonathan teased as she sat down beside him.

'Good to see you looking well, Jude,' Wade added warmly.

'I'm fine. I'm finished" she cried. 'But how can you relax,

with so much to do? You should be out there, earning your keep.'

'Piss off,' said Jonathan, throwing a bread roll at her. 'We're working our arses off.'

After lunch she went to Clare with them and watched the filming in the college chapel. It was a Christmas scene so the chapel was seasonally decorated and the choristers sang beautiful medieval carols. Jude sat without a care in the world, drinking in the beauty all around her, while Jonanathan and the camera operator shot and re-shot three scenes with a group of very agitated choir boys. By the time they'd finished everybody but Jude was pretty hot and bothered. The dank, wet evening soon cooled them down.

'Perfect weather for the final scenes,' said Jude.

'What?' grumbled Jonathan, hunched deep into his jacket.

'Dank, gloomy and filled with foreboding,' she answered cheerfully.

'Give me LA any day,' Jonathan said.

That night Wade, Kate and Jonathan had a working supper in the Garden House Hotel, all carefully avoiding wines and aperitifs as they poured over the last few scripts. There were a few alterations in episodes four and five, nothing drastic, though Jude was warned she might have to do some minor cutting, as most of the scripts were running six or seven minutes over the allocated fifty-five minutes. The final script was what took up most of the discussion. Everybody was unanimous in their decision - they liked it.

'We have to see Robert killed,' Jonathan said conclusively. 'Now, if nobody minds, I'm getting a drink before the bar closes.'

Over Highland malts they decided to do the final scene somewhere in the North, when Robert was away, visiting his family.

'And after Robert's death what we do about Duncan and his move to the States?' Kate asked.

'Why do we need it?' Jonathan asked. 'It's not necessary. Robert's dead. That's where it should end.'

'No,' Jude answered him firmly. 'Absolutely not. There must be no doubt in the viewers' minds that Duncan is a changed man.'

'Jude, I suggest you look at the scene again then we come to a final decision on Friday morning,' Wade suggested

Jude nodded.

'Let's meet up at my place,' she said. 'It's quieter than the production office.'

'Agreed,' said Jonathan. 'Now, who's for another Laphroaig?'

Jude was up early the next morning, working on the re write, which turned out to be few words and a lot of action. When she'd finished the first draft she set about tidying her house, enjoying mopping and polishing as she put her neglected rooms in order. She cleaned the windows, washed the curtains, even thought of painting the hall, she was in such of fever of domestic frenzy. She bought flowers from the market and mixed them with whatever greenery remained in the garden. As she cleaned the house she also cleared her mind, and felt suddenly lighthearted as the stress of writing fell away from her. On Thursday night she finished writing Robert's death scene in Belfast and made some notes for Wade's script meeting the following morning.

The meeting never happened. Wade phoned from London to say he'd been held up and Jonathan turned up alone.

'Where's Kate?' Jude asked, when she opened the door.

'In bed, with a tummy bug,' he answered.

When he walked into the kitchen it was his turn to look surprised.

'Where's Wade?'

'Held up in London,' she told him.

It would have been funny if it hadn't been so explosive. The one thing they'd assiduously avoided for two months had happened by accident: they were alone together. Barefoot

and a little bleary-eyed, Jude busied herself with the coffee she was spooning into the jug. Seeing her avoiding his eye, Jonathan set his jaw hard. He was going to get through this meeting if it killed him.

'So, how did the death scene go?' he asked briskly.

'OK,' she said, handing him a copy of the rewritten scene. Casting a professional eye down the pages, he read slowly and carefully.

'It could work well,' he concluded. 'But how does Duncan get to hear of his lover's death?'

'Exactly my thoughts,' Jude answered excitedly. 'He hears it on the local news that night – Cambridge classicist killed in head-on car collision.'

Jonathan smiled. 'Yes. Go on.'

'Then we cut to Paradise Island, the little cottage they lived in by the river.'

He nodded.

'It's December,' she added. 'The garden's overgrown, damp, sodden, grey. Duncan lays a wreath there, in memory of Robert, then goes away.' She paused, embarrassed, to wipe a tear from her eye. 'Sorry, I do love my characters.'

'So, how do we know what happens to Duncan?'

'We see everything in his face as he shuts the garden gate, the sound of his footsteps on the towpath. He goes into the future alone. You're the director, Jonathan, you'll have to create that atmosphere.'

He thoughtfully reached for his cup. Seeing it empty she said, 'More coffee?'

That was the point where Jonathan should have stood up and left. Instead he nodded. As Jude poured she said, 'I had a card from Claudia this morning.'

It was lying on the kitchen table, a photograph of the Himalayas.

'Is she well?'

'Yes. Haven't you heard from her?' The minute the question was out of her mouth Jude realised how stupid she'd been. Of

course he hadn't heard from her, otherwise he would never have asked how she was.

'No, not for months.' He paused then added, 'Claudia's known for years about me and you.'

No, no, Jude prayed. Please don't talk about it.

'She asked me if I'd fucked you and I said yes. Then she asked me if I loved you.' He paused. 'And I said yes to that too.'

Jude stared at him, her eyes big and frightened.

'Why did you leave me that morning, Jude?'

Unable to meet his gaze, she walked to the window and looked out at her vegetable garden.

'I . . .' she started, but her throat was tense and dry.

He crossed the room and stood beside her, tall and dark, his eyes boring into her. He'd waited five years for this moment and no matter how much it hurt her, he was going to say his piece.

'Did you spare a thought for us, Jude? The way we loved that night?'

'Yes,' she cried, interrupting him. 'I was horrified. I tried to forget it.'

He threw back his head.

'That's like saying you tried to stop breathing!'

'It was a betrayal, Jonathan, of the people we loved. Did *you* spare a thought for *that?*'

'No. We were beyond boundaries, you and I. In another world,' he reminded her. 'I couldn't think of anything but you for a whole year.'

He tried to take her hands but she clenched them so tightly together he couldn't break her grip. If she let him touch her, even for a second, the passion she felt would blow them both apart.

'Why did you marry David?'

'I wanted to be safe.'

His dark head drooped and he let out a long sigh.

'Safe.' He repeated the word as if he couldn't comprehend

it. Hardly daring to breathe for the trembling throughout her body Jude watched him turn away from her, then suddenly he whirled round and grabbed her tightly by the arms.

'I love you,' he shouted harshly. '*I love you*!'

The words ripped through her, shattering her crumbling defences. She was in his arms and kissing him, pressing her body hard against his, sobbing.

'Jude. Jude. Jude.' He chanted her name like a talisman as he opened her mouth and drank in the glory of her taste.

Passion blazed through them like a forest fire. Hardly daring to let go of each other they stumbled up the stairs, removing clothes along the way, then fell naked on to the bed where they finally paused for breath, lost in bewilderment as they stared at each other and smiled. Taking his beautiful face in her hands, Jude slowly kissed his mouth, the tip of his nose, each of his closed eyes, then his neck and chest, glorying in his perfect golden body. He groaned with joy as she lay on him, rubbing her hands along his strong thighs until she found him.

'Oh . . .' she sighed, ready for him, desperate for him, but Jonathan took her further. Running his fingers along the length of her back, he traced her spine down to her hips where he caressed her rounded buttocks, silky and firm under his touch. Pushing hard against him, Jude murmured in a frenzy of love and desire: 'Jonathan, Jonathan. Please . . .'

'Yes, my love, yes,' he answered, lifting her on to his swollen cock. Letting out a cry of delight she pressed down on to him and they started to move together, slowly, very slowly, sighing and gasping at the pleasure they gave each other. Suddenly there was an urgency, a quickening, as they pushed deeper into the other, holding on, crying out each other's name as their need merged and they were moving as one. Then suddenly it was there, that great tidal wave of ecstacy. They paused together, gazing at each other in wonder and delight, then climaxed with a ringing cry of joy. Jude lay perfectly still. She could hardly open her eyes, didn't

want to open her eyes, because if she did, the pale blue sea that rocked her so peacefully would disappear. She reached out for him and smiled.

'Jonathan.' She murmured his name like a prayer

'Jude.'

They lay in complete silence, awash with happiness. Then slowly they started to explore each other's bodies all over again. Suddenly Jude saw the time on her bedside clock.

'It's nearly ten,' she said, trying hard to sound urgent but not making it.

He didn't answer but turned her over so that he could kiss her hips and run his fingers underneath her belly to stroke her clitoris. Time was irrelevant as she moved slowly and rhythmically to the soft delicacy of his gentle fingers. As she groaned he grew huge and plunged into her. She came again, immediately, with a great cry of wonder. It was a joy to hold him to her, feel him breathing on top of her.

'Jude, I'm frightened of leaving you.'

Seeing him so vulnerable and foolishly in love brought tears to her eyes.

'You don't have to,' she said, jumping out of bed. 'Come on, we'll go together.'

'Naked?'

'Oh, yes.'

Laughing and kissing, grabbing hold of each other and hugging, they eventually got dressed and ran down the Backs to Trinity Great Court, where the cast and camera crew had been waiting for quarter of an hour. The minute they saw Jude and Jonathan they all knew, and smiled.

'Odder things have happened,' the first assistant director whispered to the focus puller.

Jude sat and watched, her eyes feasting on Jonathan as he directed the morning's filming. She hadn't a clue where they were in her scripts, she could hardly remember the names of her characters. She was gone. Eyes wide and wondrous, like a child at Christmas. Hair tousled, cheeks flushed and a

smile on her lips that grew and grew every time Jonathan turned to her.

'Oh, fuck,' Kate said to the PA.

'I think they just did,' the PA giggled.

When Wade arrived that afternoon he saw it too.

'Shit! There's always somebody on a shoot. I didn't expect it to be them.'

'Oh, no?' Kate said. 'They've been crazy about each other from the start.'

When they'd finished work for the day Jonathan took Jude's hand and they ran home, where they made love all night till dawn.

That November was a golden month. Short, dark, damp days and long, long nights. They lived together, sharing the same bed, the same food, and always the same shower. The house rang with their laughter and was filled with their love. They built huge log fires in the evening and lay on the rug making love until the embers died. They made huge feasts which they never ate because all they wanted was the touch and kiss and taste of each other. They drank red wine and pink champagne but nothing made them as drunk as the sight of each other across a crowded room. They went to the cinema and theatre, but always left before the end, desperate to make love and lie naked in each other's arms. When he had a meeting with the film crew Jude paced the house, like a lioness hungry for her mate.

'You're mine!' she cried as he walked in, and pulling the clothes off his back she took him right there in the hallway.

They both glowed with love, their faces were radiant with happiness and every day was like a blessing because it was another day of being together. They had friends round to dinner, for lunch at the weekends, drinks at the end of a long day's filming, even offering breakfast if anybody wanted to stay overnight. But nobody did. The cast and crew left them to their nights. They knew what Jonathan

and Jude refused even to think of, that their days were numbered.

Everybody knew filming was scheduled to end the first week in December. It was a fact that Jude stonewalled until Wade's final meeting with the production team in Cambridge. After he'd left for London she clung to Jonathan, too frightened to speak.

'Jude, this is our beginning. It's not the end,' Jonathan assured her.

She nodded and gulped.

'I can't live without you.'

'Then don't, sweetheart,' he answered softly.

'David,' she sobbed.

Holding her in his arms, Jonathan stroked her wet face and stared up at the ceiling. Fucking David, he thought, then turned to Jude and kissed her.

When December set in, cold and frosty, Jude determined they would have Christmas together.

'Isn't it a little early?' he asked, trying to make his anxious question sound like a joke.

'No,' she answered, wildly excited. 'We'll have an end of shoot party at my house,' she explained. 'That'll be our Christmas.'

He wanted to ask, 'And what about the *real* Christmas? Where will we be?' but didn't want to spoil her glittering bright happiness.

There weren't any rewrites during the last week so Jude absented herself from the set and bought up all the holly and mistletoe she could find on Cambridge market. She also had an enormous Christmas tree delivered to the house and set it up in the hall, with tinsel and twinkling lights. When Jonathan came home he smiled in delight as she took him around the house, showing off the brightly decorated rooms.

'It's like fairyland,' he said, laughing as he hugged her close. She smiled up at him but he could see the fear in her eyes. 'I love you, my darling,' he whispered. 'Don't be frightened.'

'I'm not,' she said, 'I'm excited.'

His stomach churned and for the first time he realised he wasn't sure of her.

'Jude.' He caught her in his arms, and gently held her face, forcing her to look at him. 'We can have a life together. A life of complete love.' She tried to avert her eyes from his searing gaze. 'I lost you five years ago, Jude. I swear to God, I won't lose you again.'

Tears slipped from the corners of her eyes and flowed unchecked down her face.

'I don't want to hurt David,' she whispered.

Blind fear gripped him.

'My love. My dearest, dearest Jude.'

They made love right there, under the twinkling Christmas tree. It was sweet and tender, reaching out and taking each other quickly, a reassurance that they still had some time left.

Jude bought presents for the thirty people she'd invited to the party. She wrapped them in silver paper and piled them under the tree. For Jonathan she had something special: a stocking stuffed with gifts which she would give him the day he left Cambridge.

She spent the last day of the shoot at home, boiling up Marks and Spencer's Christmas puddings, making mince pies and roasting turkey with chestnuts. The house was warm and smelt of rich spices and winter fruits. As she listened to a CD of carols from King's College she blotted out all reality and lived only for the next few hours. Jonathan came home when it was dark, covered in a sleety snow. His face warm and ruddy, his dark hair damp across his forehead.

'You look like a little boy,' she said, hugging him, snow and all.

'It's so beautiful out there.' He held open the front door and watched the snow fall on the Backs. 'Through your eyes, Jude, I could learn to like this town.'

'Come on, let's have a drink before we change.'

In the lounge, softly lit with dozens of candles and twinkling Christmas tree lights, they sat before the log fire and drank pink champagne.

'Merry Christmas,' she said, chinking her glass against his.

Jonathan didn't echo her toast, but sipped his wine and said carefully, 'I'll only say that to you on Christmas Day Jude, I leave tomorrow and we have to draw the line between fact and fiction. We need to talk.'

'We will, next week, before David gets home.'

She turned to gaze into the flickering fire.

'Sweetheart,' he said, taking her hand and kissing each of her fingers in turn, 'what are you afraid of?'

'Reality,' she answered, laying her head against his chest. 'I love the smell of your skin,' she said, undoing his shirt to run her fingers over his chest.

'Darling.' He lifted her chin and looked into her face. 'I want to spend the rest of my life with you. We must talk '

She stared up into his eyes, dark with love, and whispered, 'I promise we'll talk next week.'

The party was riotous. Thirty people turned up, most of them in fancy dress, and danced by candlelight till midnight. Then they moved into Jude's big kitchen where they ate a traditional Christmas dinner, followed by more champagne. Torquil and Wade gave funny speeches and congratulated everybody on a wonderful job. Rose and Kate did a song and dance routine. The editor had put together the most hilarious film of out takes which reduced all of them to screaming hysterics. Some people began to drift off about three, others fell asleep on the sofas. Jude and Jonathan danced till dawn. Swaying to the music, watching the soft snow settle on the windows, Jude blotted out tomorrow until the future walked right in and greeted her. Suddenly the music stopped, the lights blazed on and David was standing there, in front of her and Jonathan Jude tried to jump away but Jonathan held her arm very tightly.

'Who are these people?' David snarled, his eyes flashing like cold steel.

'My friends.'

'Get them out!'

Nobody needed telling. The house was empty in five minutes, apart from Jonathan who stood firmly beside Jude.

'I said, get out,' David said, his eyes wild with anger.

'No.'

Jude shuddered in fear.

'Jonathan,' she whispered.

'I love Jude,' he said, proud to speak the truth.

'So do I – and I'm married to her.'

'And what exactly does that mean? You possess her?'

'I'm her husband.'

'And I'm her lover.'

'Stop talking about me as if I was a mute,' she cried, suddenly finding her voice. Moving away from Jonathan, she stood between the two men who were on the point of thumping each other. 'I need to talk to David.'

'No,' Jonathan answered. 'I don't trust him.' What he meant was, 'I don't trust you with him, Jude.'

'I *must* speak to him.'

Seeing the fear and pain in her eyes, Jonathan's heart contracted with love.

'Please?' she murmured.

Releasing her arm, he turned and walked away. 'I'll be back,' he called as he disappeared into the swirling snow.

Jude let out a long sigh, then looked at David.

'Is it true?' he asked.

She nodded.

'You've been lovers, here in my house, while I've been away?'

'For six weeks,' she admitted.

David glared at her with such contempt Jude really thought he would hit her. Instead he picked up a bottle and threw it at the wall.

'You fucking bitch!' he yelled. 'You bitch!' He stormed around the house, out of his mind with fury, tearing at the decorations and ripping down the fairy lights. 'How could you?' he kept saying. 'How could you do it, Jude?' Tears streamed down his face, tears of anger and pain. In the bedroom, when he saw the Christmas stocking with Jonathan's name on it, he lost all control.

'Get out. Get out,' he screamed. 'Before I kill you!'

Jude went. Wearing only her flimsy party dress she slipped out of the side door and watched dawn break from the window of the garden shed. Feeling like her brain was as cold and dead as her body, Jude stared out into the bleak landscape and made her decision. She would leave, right now, with Jonathan. It was over.

She hurried back into the house, crept upstairs to pack a bag and found David, weeping like a child on their bed. Turning from the rumpled sheets he saw her, pale as a ghost in the doorway.

'Jude, don't leave me. Oh, God, please don't leave me.'

The ice in Jude's heart melted as she looked at his ravaged face. In one single movement she was beside him, lying on the bed, cradling him in her arms.

'I'm sorry. I'm sorry,' she murmured, over and over again. 'Forgive me.'

Burying his face against her soft breasts, David slept. Jude stared up at the ceiling, her eyes wide open as tears streamed down her face and seeped into her pillow. She would stay with David and have his child.

For the second time in her life she turned her back on Jonathan and the life of love he offered. In that ice cold dawn she chose David and Cambridge.

Chapter Thirteen

Jude was pregnant by the end of March. She had neither seen nor heard from Claudia since the book launch at Trinity College, six months earlier. For some reason the confirmation of her pregnancy made Jude long to contact her friend. They met for lunch on a blustery, cold day in April. As they waited for their meal to arrive Jude said, 'I'm pregnant.'

Claudia stared at her. Jude answered the unspoken question. 'It's David's baby.'

The waiter appeared with Jude's plain toast and vegetable soup and Claudia's French pâté and red wine.

'Do you want me to congratulate you, which I do quite freely, and talk babies all lunchtime?' Claudia asked. 'Or do you want to talk about Jonathan?'

'Jonathan,' Jude answered. 'Have you seen him?' Her heart ached as she spoke his name but she was an expert these days at hiding pain.

Claudia nodded.

'He came to see me just before he left for LA. He looked like hell.'

The toast in Jude's mouth felt thick and leathery. She gulped hard and put down her spoon.

'He wanted to see me to say goodbye.' Claudia spoke calmly but her eyes were angry. 'Funny, he was so unlike the Jonathan I've known and adored for years. He didn't play clever games or avoid any issues, he just said he didn't want to keep cheating on me. Hah!' She laughed bitterly. 'I said, why not? You've been doing it for years. I don't mind. I don't care about anything, as long as you'll stick around.'

She shook her head. 'He said he couldn't do that any more, because of you.' Jude stared at Claudia, her eyes wide with unshed tears. 'I don't understand. You had him, totally. Not just once, but *twice*, and still you dumped him. What kind of a modern tragedy do you think you're writing, Jude?'

'I couldn't leave David.'

'But you knew that the first time around. Once is an accident, twice is fucking selfish!'

'I love Jonathan more than I've ever loved anybody,' Jude answered. 'But I can't leave David,' she repeated.

'Well, now you're pregnant, you won't have to,' Claudia snapped. Seeing the raw pain in Jude's face she forced her voice under control. 'Have *you* heard from Jonathan?'

Jude shook her head.

'No.'

She'd last seen him the week before Christmas. She would never forget that horrific week. The decorations hanging in tatters around the house, like faded banners at a funeral; the broken fairy lights dangling off the tree that had lost all its needles. David upstairs all day in his study. When Jonathan turned up in the pouring rain, hunched deep inside his sheepskin jacket, Jude's heart exploded with love. Weeping, she laid her head against his chest and drank in the sweet smell of him. He was like coming home. The minute he touched her, she was perfectly at peace.

'Oh, my love,' she cried as the rain poured down on their heads. Holding her at arm's length, Jonathan looked into her ravaged face.

'Come with me?' he whispered.

A great sob ripped through her body and she clung on to him for support. Seeing her agony, he knew her answer and tears streamed down his face, mixing with the rain drops.

'You can't?' he murmured into her hair. Jude stared up at him, her dark gold hair wet and clinging to her hollow face.

The words were wrenched out of her. 'I can't.'

Tenderly, so as not to hurt her, Jonathan plucked her

hands from his coat and placed them together in a gesture of prayer. Kissing each of her fingertips he said, 'I'll love you till the day I die but this has to stop before we both lose our minds.' He took her face between his hands, in the old familiar gesture she remembered, and kissed her hard on the mouth. 'Goodbye, my darling,' he muttered, and turning on his heel he walked away.

From his study David watched Jonathan go and knew that Jude's decision to stay with him was final.

Now she stared vacantly at the restaurant wall. She lived in the same house as her husband, sometimes shared the same bed as him, answered to the same name, but she wasn't Jude anymore. Her internal organs were unformed without Jonathan, her mind a void. It was impossible to shut out her love for him, as she had done so effectively five years ago. He was the most vital and beautiful thing in her life. Her decision had indeed been final but Jonathan lived on inside her like a bright, burning flame.

'So, it's over for both of us,' Claudia said, breaking into Jude's reverie. 'And you're pregnant. Was that the deal with David?'

Even in her misery Jude smiled. Trust Claude to hit the nail on the head.

'Having a baby was very much part of the deal,' she answered.

'You look pale,' Claudia said, when what she really meant was, 'You look like shit.' In all the years she'd known Jude she'd never seen her so thin and white. All the vibrancy had gone from her formerly dazzling eyes and golden hair. Even her voice had lost its former ring.

'I'm told by everybody this is the worst part of the pregnancy.'

'What about your job?' Claudia asked. 'How do you manage the commuting, for Christ's sakes?'

'It's a nightmare,' Jude admitted. 'I can hardly get up in the morning and when I do I'm usually sick. By the time I've got

to Broadcasting House I feel like I've done a full day's work. God knows what I'd do without Gareth and Sandra. It will get better,' she added, trying to sound cheerful. 'In a few months time I'll be big, bonny and blooming.'

Looking at her wasted body and drawn face Claudia seriously doubted it, but she too feigned a cheerfulness she didn't feel.

'So, what're you going to do about Forum?'

'I don't know. Since Jonathan I've lost my grip on the programme.'

'That would really piss him off,' Claudia said crossly.

Jude smiled at her.

'Enough of me. What about you, Claude?'

'I've been offered work with MBC in New York. A two-year contract. I think I'll go.' They looked at each other sadly. 'I never thought I'd feel so empty without Jonathan,' she admitted. 'Nobody's heard from him. Not even Wade. He never showed up for the BAFTA awards but then again, neither did you.'

'I couldn't. The only way David and I can co-exist is by pretending *Secrets* never happened,' Jude answered.

'You win a BAFTA for a brilliant series and you ignore it! Jesus, Jude. What is it about you that makes you treat David as if he were God Almighty?'

It was a thoroughly miserable lunch and by the end of it they were both eager to get away from each other. Out in the street with the wind blowing and rain starting to fall they said goodbye.

'Write, Claude,' Jude whispered, holding on to her arm.

Claudia nodded and smiled then turned and immediately disappeared into the crowd around Oxford Circus. Jude knew she wouldn't get in touch for a very long time – maybe never.

She walked back to Broadcasting House and took the lift up to the sixth floor. Feeling rather giddy, she hurried into her room and sat down.

'Are you all right, Jude?' Sandra asked.

She nodded.

'Fine, just a bit dizzy.'

Sandra, the mother of two strapping young sons, knew for sure that Jude wasn't fine. From the start this pregnancy hadn't been right. It wasn't just the sickness, which though unpleasant was perfectly normal, it was Jude herself. Since she'd come back to work in the New Year she'd been listless and preoccupied, a shadow of her former dynamic self. Fortunately, Forum hadn't suffered so far. The audience ratings were just as high and the quality of the programme was as good as ever but Friday in the studio totally wiped out Jude these days. No way would she be able to work right up until the seventh month of her pregnancy, Sandra thought. It would be a miracle if she got through till the end of April.

As Jude dragged herself through the afternoon – meetings, telephone calls, script writing – all the usual things she'd formerly done so effortlessly and with such gusto, she too wondered how she could go on. These days she never worked on the train in and out of London. Instead she slept. When she got home she had something light to eat, ran a bath and then went straight to bed where sleep engulfed her like a warm friend. She hadn't an intelligent thought in her head, she just wanted to be left alone, in total peace. Even David was concerned by her withdrawn state.

'Is it normal?' he asked Tom, their GP friend. 'It's not just the pregnancy,' David confessed. 'It's everything about her.'

Tom, who knew Jude well, reassured him as much as he could.

'David, her body's doing what it's best at – taking care of itself. She's healing slowly after her upsets,' he said, searching around for the right word to describe her affair with Jonathan which Jude had never concealed from him. 'At the same time the baby's growing inside her. I'd say sleep and peace are the best things for her right now.'

'What about her job?' David asked. 'It's draining her.'

'Whether it's draining her or not, she needs that too,' Tom answered.

It was true. Jude did need Forum. It got her out of Cambridge every day and took her away from David. She would have gone mad if she'd stayed at home, in a house that still echoed with too many painful memories. She couldn't even walk down the Backs these days and avoided Queens' and Jesus Colleges like they were the plague. London was big and neutral. She could lose herself in work then sleep for hours on the train. The weekends were hell. David fussed over her like a mother hen, thrilled at the prospect of fatherhood; he talked babies until Jude's head ached with midwives, Natural Childbirth, bootees and layettes. For her it was all a blank. Even as her belly rounded and her breasts grew big and tender, she still felt empty, as if the pregnancy weren't hers but somebody else's.

A wet May gave way to a hot June and in the third month, just as Jude had stopped feeling sick, she miscarried. It was a Friday morning and she started with back pains as Forum began, live on air. That half-hour was the most agonising of her life. Clutching the desk, beads of sweat breaking on her brow, she thought she might collapse. Fortunately her guests saw her distress and held forth, anxiously watching the colour drain from Jude's face. As the on-air light went off she stood up and a rush of brilliant red blood trickled down her legs.

'Oh, no. Sandra, help me!' she cried as a searing pain shot through her womb and into her vagina. Half fainting, with blood pouring out of her, Jude was carried back to the office, where she lay on the floor with paper towels underneath her. An ambulance took her to St Thomas' Hospital where she spent the rest of the afternoon gently sedated as the baby broke up inside her. David came about six and found her white as a corpse, in a drugged sleep. He stayed beside her, holding her hand, weeping for the child he'd so longed for. The following day the doctor assured them both that Jude could easily conceive again, and there

was no reason why she shouldn't go full term with another pregnancy.

'These things happen,' he said with a sad smile.

David drove her home to Cambridge. As she sat beside him, watching the beauty of the sun drenched countryside flash by, Jude laid her hands on her belly. It was still full, not taut anymore but flabby. Between her legs she felt the hospital sanitary towel, seeping up the blood that still flowed out of her, and thought of the baby she'd lost. She hadn't felt love or possession, she'd simply felt inhabited, taken over by a new life that craved all her vitality. Now she felt empty. It was a different emptiness to the gnawing hunger she'd felt for Jonathan but it had the same finality. Both were deaths. One was chosen, the other decided for her. Maybe she wasn't fit to love. She certainly wasn't to be trusted, she'd proved that twice over to both David and Jonathan. Would she have made a good mother?

In the empty weeks that followed Jude and David went into a severe decline. Jude's body didn't recover quickly and David grew more depressed with every passing day. He stopped going into King's, which was unheard of, and moped about the house all day, unable to read or write.

'I feel like I'm in mourning,' he told Jude, when she found him one day weeping in the garden. 'In mourning for a person I loved briefly and lost forever.' Jude put her arms around him and he leant his head against her shoulder. 'I thought the baby would make us happy,' he confessed 'I hoped you'd forget Jonathan and love me again, the way you used to.'

'Oh, David,' she whispered. 'We will have another baby. We'll just have to wait till I'm stronger.'

'Promise you will, Jude? Promise?'

She nodded her head and smiled, but would she? Could she go through all that again? She felt weak and exhausted, desperate to go back to work, but Tom, her doctor, had insisted she stay at home for at least another week, maybe two

'I'll go mad,' she told him during an appointment at his surgery. 'I need to get away from David, not be cooped up with him, moping around the house all day.'

'He is reacting very badly,' Tom said.

'He thought having a family would save our marriage. He wants me to get pregnant again.'

'Well, you can't, not for a while anyway.'

'Try telling that to David.'

'I have, Jude. As a friend and a doctor.'

She smiled apologetically.

'I'm sorry, Tom. You're a good friend. God knows what we'd do without your support.'

'Jude, he's a desperate man, trying to keep you and make the marriage work.'

'What marriage?' she asked wearily. 'Sometimes I think I'm going mad.' She buried her head in her hands.

'It was a good marriage, one of the best,' Tom assured her.

'But that was before Jonathan,' she reminded him. 'You know it's almost a year ago since it all started. *Secrets* was commissioned last June,' she reminded him.

'Do you ever regret your decision to stay, Jude?'

'Yes, often,' she admitted. 'But I couldn't leave him, even though we're both ground down with misery.'

'You've got to get out of that house and away from Cambridge,' Tom advised.

'How? The university is David's umbilical cord.'

'Believe me, if he stays he'll have a breakdown.'

Oddly enough it was the Master of King's who gave David the way out. He and his wife called for tea and were knocked sideways to see the Osbornes so worn and depressed.

'You two have had more than your fair share of trouble this year,' the Master remarked.

David and Jude smiled thinly, both praying he wouldn't be drawn into talking about the loss of their child.

'You could take a sabbatical year off, David,' the Master suggested. 'You've had one due for years and never taken it up.'

'That's because I hate being away from Cambridge.'

'Well, maybe now's the right time to get away,' the Master continued forcefully. 'You need a change, both of you,' he added, noting Jude's thin, drawn face. 'Recharge your batteries and come back refreshed.'

Jude's face dropped. Go away together for a whole year? It would be a living nightmare. She quickly changed the subject to the college garden party, hoping nobody would mention sabbaticals again. Oddly enough it was David who did, the next day.

'Jude, I've been thinking over what the Master said about taking a year off.'

'Oh?' she muttered, her heart sinking into her boots.

'Yes. Let's go to Venice.'

She spun round and smiled at him.

'Venice,' she sighed. Venice, far away from England and all the memories of Jonathan. Venice, glittering bright on the edge of the sea. 'Yes, David,' she said with such energy and conviction he burst out laughing.

By September, nearly a year after Jude's affair with Jonathan, three months after her miscarriage, the Osbornes had packed up and, like the swallows, headed south, to the sea and the sun.

Chapter Fourteen

They rented the top flat of a Renaissance palace, off a narrow, smelly alleyway called Calle del Carbon – Coal Alley. Their back windows gave on to the rooftops of Venice, to bell towers spiking the azure blue sky and a thousand bristling television aerials. Their balcony looked on to the glories of the Grand Canal. To their left was the Municipio, Venice's town hall, to their right the Rialto Bridge, the Ca' d'Oro and the fish market, the Pescheria. Across the canal, the church of San Silvestro and the rooftop of the Friari.

It was Beata who found the flat for them and she who led them through the network of little alleyways and campos to Calle del Carbon.

'*Benvenuti*,' she said, as they entered a dark marble hallway that smelt of drains and cats. 'You wanted to know why nobody else wanted it – that's why.' She pointed to four flights of stairs winding their way up and up, as far as they could see. 'You're on the top floor. Ninety-two steps, I've counted every one. This place is only for the young and healthy.'

What was left of Jude's breath disappeared in a gasp of delight when Beata threw open the door of the apartment and they stepped into a white marble corridor.

'It's huge,' she cried.

'Check out the view,' Beata said, opening the dark wooden shutters. Jude stepped out on to the balcony and the sound she loved best in the world was right there, below her. The sound of water slapping against the banks of the Grand Canal as *vaporetti* churned up and down, the cry of the *gondolieri* as they passed each other under the Rialto Bridge, the hum of

Italian as the Venetians went about their business, all wrapped around by the distant murmur of the Adriatic.

'Oh, I love it,' she murmured, leaning back against the shutters and sighing with happiness. 'Beata, thank you.'

'Don't thank me, thank the student who told me about it, and left it very dirty too,' she said, running her finger along the grimy shutters. 'I warn you, it's a noisy flat. It's one of the busiest areas in Venice. There's always a lot of traffic, and a constant flow of tourists.'

'I don't care,' Jude said.

'The worst thing is the boat terminal, down there.' Beata pointed to a sectioned off area of the canal below their balcony where gondolas bounced on one side and *vaporetti* were moored the other. 'Boats are moored there every night and leave very early in the morning.'

'How early?' David asked.

'Five, I should think,' she answered.

David pulled a glum face but Jude smiled.

'We'll be happy here, noise and all.'

'Well, I'll be off,' said Beata, and quickly left.

'Is she all right?' Jude asked, surprised by her sudden exit.

'Yes, of course,' David answered airily. 'Look at this.'

He opened the door into a huge sitting room with an ancient grand piano, a big, old wood-burning stove and an enormous sofa with most of its stuffing scattered all over the floor. Even though it was dark and dirty now Jude knew the room could still be beautiful.

'It would make a wonderful study,' David said, tinkling the keys of the piano.

'Yes. We could work here together,' she said. Throwing her arms around his neck, she hugged him tight and laughed with joy for the first time in months. 'Oh, David. We are going to be so happy here.'

Holding her close he murmured into her hair, 'I hope so, Jude. With all my heart, I hope so.'

She never, never tired of the view and the noise outside

their window became the beat of her life. She loved Calle del Carbon. It became what their place in Cambridge had been a refuge. Jude took immense pleasure in making the flat into a home. David helped with the painting and lugged second-hand furniture along the streets and up the four floors to the top flat, but it was Jude who gave the place colour and life. She pushed all the stuffing back into the faded sofa and recovered it in a faded, Venetian gold brocade, then piled it with cushions in primary colours. She bought cheap white muslin and hung curtains across the balcony windows. On fine days, with the shutters open, they lifted and drifted on the breeze from the Grand Canal. She framed huge prints from the Accademia Galleries and hung them along the white marble corridor and around the dining and sitting rooms.

Her greatest challenge was the kitchen. A minimalist's delight, it was tiny with a leak in the ceiling that grew worse and worse as the winter wore on, two deep white butler's sinks, a basic gas stove, one shelf and a formica cupboard hanging half off the wall. She ripped out all the old stuff and set to with a borrowed Black and Decker drill, fixing shelves from floor to ceiling. They looked fresh and bright against the newly-painted walls and Jude hung dried flowers and herbs from hooks along the top shelf, then filled the rest with pans, pots and the little crockery they had. She cleaned out the sooty old wood burning stove and on the first chilly afternoon cautiously lit a fire. Terrified that it would blow sky high, she sat nervously watching it wheeze into life. By the time David came home it was burning brightly and their sitting room was warm and cosy.

'This is nice,' he sighed, settling into the sofa and snuggling up against Jude.

'Perfect,' she said, listening to the banter of the *gondolieri* below. Now that autumn had set in they covered their gondolas as soon as it was dark then went into their local bar for Grappa and a coffee before heading home. As long as it stayed warm they could ply their trade in the evening,

dirfting down the Grand Canal in flotillas, singing 'O Sole Mio' and 'Mama' to the tourists until one o'clock in the morning. Now, with the coming of the dark nights and *la nebbia*, the mist, romantic evenings for the tourists were a scratched fixture.

That night Jude and David made love for the first time since she'd miscarried. It was awkward to start with, then something happened. They suddenly needed each other, in a dark, desperate way. David held her and kissed her, then made love to her violently, calling her name loudly as he came.

'Jude, Jude. Oh, God . . .'

She held him until he slept. After Jonathan she had no illusions about love-making. Only with him had she experienced utter bliss; she neither expected it nor looked for it in anybody else. The very best she could hope for with David was that their love-making would produce a baby. That would be enough.

Galvanised by Beata, David started to do some research at the university on a new and altogether different subject: the life of Carlo Goldoni, the Venetian dramatist whom he'd previously been interested in but had never had time to read in depth. Beata was an expert on Goldoni and the Commedia dell'Arte which inspired him. Talking to her, David became very excited by the eighteenth-century *opera buffa*. Delighted with his new vigour and energy, Jude actively encouraged him in his research. He needed to rebuild his academic confidence which had taken quite a beating over the last year. She was grateful to Beata for seeing his need and directing him towards a subject that wasn't a hash of old material, but something new and completely absorbing.

Their first meal in the newly-decorated dining room was with Beata. Jude made the first course, tagliolini with mussels and prawns, and David made *fegato alla Veneziana* and *zuppa Inglese*. Beata as usual brought wonderful wines.

'The flat looks marvellous,' she enthused, wandering from room to room, admiring everything they'd done

'I love it,' Jude said, smiling at the wood burning stove like an old friend. 'We're happy here, thanks to you. Happy in a way I would never have thought possible.'

Beata smiled politely and quickly changed the subject to the Goldoni play that was on at the Teatro La Fenice that week.

They ate by candlelight, with the shutters open and the noises from the Grand Canal mixed with Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons' that David had put on. It was a pleasant evening but stiff, not like the old days with Gabriele when they'd relaxed and drunk wine till three in the morning. Jude missed him, but Beata never mentioned him. In the end Jude asked how he was.

'Do you ever bump into Gabriele?'

'I try not to.'

'So you don't know how he is, or where he lives?' Jude persevered.

'Absolutely no idea,' Beata replied in a tone that firmly precluded all further questions.

They finished supper late and walked Beata back to the Riva degli Schiavoni, where she got the *motonave* home to the Lido. No matter how many times Jude took that route to San Marco, weaving through alleyways, following the canals over looping bridges, the sudden spectacular entrance into the piazza always took her breath away. Even at midnight San Marco was lit up and a three-piece band still played outside Florian's. Lovers walked hand in hand, two dogs chased each other across the square and the odd pigeon wheeled in the arc lights. They stood waving goodbye to Beata as her boat pulled out across the lagoon, chugging towards the island of San Giorgio before it took a sharp left then headed on a straight course for the Lido.

'Why is everything in Venice so beautiful it makes me sad?' Jude asked as they retraced their steps across San Marco. 'I wonder if I'll ever take it for granted?'

'I hope not,' David whispered. 'It's brought life back to you, Jude. You're beautiful again.' They kissed in the piazzetta outside the Doges' Palace, with the waters of the lagoon splashing softly against the marble steps below.

It was only when they were nearly home that Jude asked him about Gabriele.

'It irritates me the way Beata draws a veil over any conversation to do with him,' she said. 'I wonder why she's so bitter?'

'I don't know, Jude. It finished a year ago. Why harp on about it?'

'I'm not harping on, David,' she answered firmly. 'Gabriele's an old friend and I won't sweep him under the carpet just because it suits Beata. I want to see him – and I will see him, when I find out where he lives.'

'That's up to you,' David answered evenly.

'And why are you off him?' she exclaimed. 'He was your friend too.'

'Yes, but Beata's my colleague and an old friend. It's often the way when couples split up. You have to chose.'

'That's pathetic,' she said.

As autumn set in along the Adriatic coast, mists drifted in from the sea and the temperature dropped sharply. Jude was suddenly aware of the changes in Venice. There were still tourists around, but they stayed in tight clutches around the Friari, the Accademia, San Marco, San Giorgio and Santa Maria della Salute. Only the brave and extremely curious set off with a street map and explored the backwaters of the city. For the first time, Jude saw the city out of season and was fascinated by the Venetians. Kids going to school, mothers to work, leaving their babies at the *nido* or nest, as day nurseries were delightfully called. Office workers by the score, dashing into the Municipio, doctors and nurses changing shifts at the Ospedale Civile, standing incongruously next to the Basilica of Santi Giovanni e Paolo. Daily life on the Grand Canal changed too. Instead of streams of gondolas dipping by, often blocking

the passage of the *vaporetti*, there were now more delivery boats and builders' barges. Jude watched from her balcony as builders unloaded their scaffolding, cement mixers, skips and bricks then disappeared, with their gear, down the narrow alleyways behind Calle del Carbon.

She too became more of a citizen and less of a tourist. She took to learning Italian in a serious way and discovered that shopping in the market place beside the Peschera was the best place to learn all the functional Italian she needed. She dressed with care for her morning's shopping. Avoiding an obviously English look, she copied the Italian style. Good skirt or trousers, always an elegant jacket, at that time of day hardly any jewellery but often a silk scarf and sunglasses, as the late mornings and afternoons were usually bright and hot. She got to know the traders on the market and apart from buying their local cheeses and salami, she listened to them and imitated their accent and idioms.

The fruit and vegetable market was spectacular with grapes, pomegranates, pears the size of small melons, pumpkins, lemons and grapefruits. The aubergines, peppers, zuchini, and tomatoes were huge and everything was sold with a handful of exactly the right herb. Jude quickly learnt the expression for 'How do I cook it, *a la Venezuana?*' She was given the most fabulous recipes, most of them perfectly simple, using only the freshest and best of local ingredients.

Her favourite person was the Egg Man. An old man from the countryside around Treviso, he came into Venice three times a week with his carton of new laid eggs. They were a work of art in themselves, like no other colour Jude had ever see: the deepest brown speckled with a light dusting of gold. When they were cracked open they had a yolk the colour of the Italian sun and tasted delicious. The Egg Man couldn't speak a word of standard Italian, using only his country dialect which was impenetrable to Jude. At first they communicated only in numbers.

'Due uovi, Signore. Grazie.'

His leathery brown face would wrinkle into a broad toothless smile, then he would tenderly wrap each egg in a sheet of newspaper, laying them carefully in her basket, almost sad to part with them. Jude looked out for the Egg Man on his market days and upped her egg intake by the week. Within a month they were talking in a basic, functional Italian. When Jude got stuck and couldn't understand him she'd turn to the man selling herbs and dried beans on the next stall and say, '*Cosa significa . . .*?' and all would eventually be revealed.

She loved her mornings on the market and lingered long, looking at the amazing fish for sale. She learnt to cook San Pietro, a firm white fish that the Venetians were particularly fond of, fish soup, clams, squid casserole and cuttlefish. As the weeks passed Jude became a familiar figure and the market traders grew rather fond of the lovely English girl with the wonderful eyes and the flaming golden hair. She discovered a great bar behind the Pescheria, used only by locals. At eleven it was packed with men drinking espresso and shots of fiery Grappa. After her shopping she always had a cappuccino there, and sat by the window so she could watch the constant flow of people in and out of the bar. She got into the habit of making notes in her Filofax – expressions she'd picked up, people's names and their stalls, recipes and new vocabulary. It was while she was sitting staring out of the window at the busy street that Jude suddenly saw Gabriele walk by. She jumped up and ran out of the cafe after him. Grabbing him by the arm she cried, '*Ciao*, Gabriele!'

He turned in surprise then smiled broadly and hugged her tight.

'*Cara! Come vai*?'

'*Bene, bene*. And you, how are you?'

'Good,' he answered, but he looked thinner and tired; he'd also lost a lot of hair, which in an odd sort of way suited him.

'Come and have a coffee,' she suggested.

In the cafe they talked for nearly an hour, catching up on all their news, then they started talking about themselves.

'I was sorry to hear you'd split up from Beata.' He nodded and looked very uncomfortable. 'I would have got in touch with you but nobody was very forthcoming about your address.'

'I disappeared off the scene,' he said tactfully.

'I couldn't believe you two split just because of David's research student,' she exclaimed.

'What research student?'

Looking at his face she realised he didn't have a clue what she was talking about.

'I thought you had a fling with Victoria?' she added, wishing she'd never opened her big mouth.

'*Merda*! Shit! No way, Jude,' he answered angrily. 'Who told you this?'

Seeing she'd gone too far, Jude tried bluffing. 'Oh, I can't remember. I probably got it wrong.'

'It was Beata, wasn't it?' Gabriele fumed. 'Did she tell you she had an affair with . . .' He stopped, clearly fighting to control his rage. '. . . a very dear friend?'

Jude shook her head.

'David blamed Victoria too,' she added in Beata's defence.

This time Gabriele went white with temper. 'I think we'd better change the subject before I say something I'll really regret.'

They paid for their coffee and walked back, past the little market church of San Giacomo di Rialto, along the Ruga degli Orefici, the street of the goldsmiths, and up over the Rialto Bridge. Leaning on the bridge, watching the traffic pass below, they talked about Gabriele's work for Peril San Marco.

'Things are fairly good, Jude, apart from an increase in the structural damage done by water and air pollutants.' He sighed heavily and stared into the churning waters below the Rialto. Jude nudged him with her elbow.

'Come on, Gabriele, this is a global problem. You can't carry it alone, you know.'

He nodded and smiled his soft, slow smile.

'*Hai ragione*,' he said. 'You're right. I just get gloomier these days, without Beata. She could always cheer me up, for a while at least.'

'Is there nobody else?'

'No, Jude, nobody else.' He looked into her face. 'You, *cara*, you've suffered too. I can see it in your eyes.'

This time it was Jude's turn to stare into the waters of the Grand Canal.

'I'm sorry,' he said. 'I've upset you.'

'No,' she said, taking his hand and holding it tightly. 'I fell deeply in love, Gabriele.'

'Ah,' he said.

'David was in California, teaching with Beata as a matter of fact. I'd made up my mind to leave him but when it came to it I just couldn't go. Then I got pregnant and miscarried,' she finished abruptly.

'Oh, Jude,' he cried. 'It's too much, too much.'

'It was, Gabriele,' she admitted. 'I thought I would go mad but . . .' She paused to gaze into the canal. 'We came here instead.'

Suddenly the clock over San Giacomo sounded and Gabriele checked his watch.

'Jude, forgive me. I forgot the time and now I'm late for an appointment.' He kissed her gently on the cheek. 'Come with me tomorrow, to the island of Torcello? I've to meet an engineer out there, I could show you around.'

Jude's eyes lit up.

'*Certo*. What time?'

'Ten. By the boat stop to the islands on the Fondamenta Nuova.'

'I'll be there. *Ciao*, Gabriele.'

'*Ciao, cara*.'

Jude carried her shopping home then went out on to the balcony and watched the low-lying sun gild the rooftops of the houses opposite. Suddenly all the bell towers around the city

started to ring out the hour, the Angelus, a great clamorous thundering that deafened the noises in the streets and even muted the ever present sound of the water. The bells' ringing took her mind off the question that had nagged her all the way home. Why had David and Beata both lied about Gabriele and Victoria?

Jude was on the Fondamenta Nuova at nine-thirty. After threading her way through the dark, smelly alleyways Jude was glad to be out in the open and feeling a fresh breeze on her cheeks. Along the Fondamenta the boat stops for the islands bounced up and down under the steady smack of the waves. The nearest island she could see quite clearly, San Michele cemetery where Diaghilev, Stravinsky and Ezra Pound lay buried. Further out, like a scatter of dark green pebbles across the lagoon, were Murano and Burano. Torcello, the farthest flung of all the islands, was nowhere in sight. As she gazed out, Jude's thoughts drifted to that isolated island where Venice had really begun. The Veneti were chased off the mainland by the Lombards, driven into the sea where they set up dwellings on the sand banks in the lagoon. Torcello had seemed safely far away from the invading Germans, but malaria wiped out half the Veneti and they slowly crept back across the lagoon, finally settling on the highest bank they could find, which became the Rialto. From there Venice grew into a mighty republic – La Serenissima, Queen of the Adriatic.

Lost in a day-dream, Jude didn't even see Gabriele.

'*Buon giorno, ragazza*,' he called.

Jude hugged him.

'Hi, *ragazzo*, it's good to see you.'

She realised as she said the words that it was in fact *very* good to see him. Since she and Claudia had parted she'd felt bereft of friends, especially during those months in Cambridge after her miscarriage. Gabriele was the best kind of friend, one who went back a long way and one

with whom she was completely at ease. He was also magical, like the Geni of the Lamp, taking her into Venice's most spectacular places and revealing untold treasures to her.

The boat for Torcello chugged into shore and the passengers jostled and pushed to be off first. It filled up quickly but emptied at the island of San Michele where dozens of old ladies, bearing bunches of heavy-headed chrysanthemums, got off to tend their family graves.

'Never buy chrysanthemums,' Gabriele advised as the heavy, musky smell of the autumn flowers faded on the sea breeze. 'They're the flowers of the dead.'

'Thanks for the tip.'

They sat in silence as the *vaporetto* hit the open waters. It was cold and mist shrouded the islands that rose out of the lagoon like dark monsters. When they stopped at Murano, Gabriele told Jude of the restoration work they'd done there to the floor mosaics in the ancient cathedral.

'The church was built on mud flats and the floor was caving in, taking the twelfth-century mosaic masterpieces with it. A private donor came up with money and we commissioned engineers and restorers to strengthen the foundations, install insulation and drainage, and repair the mosaics. The cathedral is one of the greatest restoration pieces around and cost *molti milioni*.'

They pulled away from Murano and headed out across the lagoon. The November sun slowly pierced the sea mist and Torcello drifted into view, a green, swampy island, dominated by its towering campanile.

'What are you doing here?' Jude asked.

'I have to meet an engineer who's checking the subsidence levels in the nave and side aisles.' To Jude's surprise Gabriele suddenly said, 'Tell me about your lover?'

She didn't look at him but stared out to sea.

'I haven't ever talked to anybody about Jonathan. I miss him like a lost limb. He was is – so beautiful, Gabriele,'

she said, her eyes bright with love and pride. 'Very intense, rather impatient, clever, funny. A wonderful man.'

'How did you manage to rebuild your marriage, Jude?'

'I'm not sure that I have. It's brittle and fragile. David insists everything will be perfect when I'm pregnant again. But it's not happened yet.'

'The body has its own time for everything.'

'David thinks I should go to the hospital in Padua and have some tests done but I don't want to get pregnant here. Venice is healing me, restoring the life I lost. I can get pregnant later.'

'Of course. You have to heal your heart and then your womb.'

She stared into his sensitive face.

'Why does love hurt so much, Gabriele?'

'It's not love that hurts, it's losing it.'

The *vaporetto* bumped into its mooring place and they disembarked. Jude was immediately struck by the loneliness of the island.

'It's the first time in my life I've ever been the only tourist,' she joked as they walked along the path that led inland.

'Can you believe that Torcello was once a rich and powerful trading city, with a population of over forty thousand?'

Jude looked at the swampy land, dense with green thickets and dotted with solitary houses, and shook her head.

'Right now, no.'

'There were monasteries and palaces all over the island. Most of them were dismantled and the stone shipped back across the water, to be re-used in Venice.'

In what must have been the central *campo* they found a dog scratching itself and Locanda Cipriani, one of the most expensive places in the Veneto.

'The Queen of England, and Ernest Hemingway came to this hotel for peace and quiet,' Gabriele said.

'I haven't a moment's doubt they found it,' replied Jude. 'There's nothing around for miles.'

'I think we can just about afford a coffee. Will that do?'

'Perfect.'

The coffee was superb; so were the cheese and ham toasted sandwiches which Jude bought.

'This is fabulous,' she said, settling deeper into her luxurious chair. 'Couldn't we stay for lunch?'

Laughing, Gabriele escorted her out of Cipriani's, and arm in arm they walked into the cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta. It was a huge, stark structure, like a fortress rather than a house of prayer. From the high, dark walls mosaics glittered out - gold, silver, ruby, emerald and aquamarine – caught the pale wintry light and led the eye up to the high altar where a lone Madonna stood, framed in a roof of gold.

That single Madonna wrung Jude's heart. She had the faraway, tragic look of the Byzantine icons, sombrely reflected in the black of her robe, but the child in her arms was golden. Bouncing, bonny and rosy with health, he stretched out his arms to the world, eager to play and explore. His mother looked on, guarded, alert as a hunted animal, but the child was free and smiling. As Jude stared into the eyes of the fated mother and her perfectly beautiful son, tears slipped unchecked down her face. She moved further down the nave, away from Gabriele and the engineer, closer to the Madonna.

In the apse was a mosaic Annunciation, with Gabriel on the left, saluting Mary who cowered away from the glorious, burning angel, one hand laid protectively across her womb. Jude knelt and stared and stared, first at the terrified girl who was to be the mother, then at the mother who carried the sins of the world on her shoulders. She had no idea how long she sat in the cold, dark church, no idea what transpired between Gabriele and his engineer. All she knew was a huge compassion for the young girl, framed in glittering gold, and a great yearning for the child she'd lost. When she felt Gabriele's hand on her shoulder she realised she was still weeping.

'*Cara*, come outside,' he urged.

She nodded and followed him into the rambling, neglected garden behind the church where the baptistry stood. The light was just beginning to fade and a mist was drifting in from the sea. Jude shivered, as if waking from a long sleep.

'I never felt my baby. As suddenly as it came, it went. David ranted and wept but I couldn't. I didn't feel I had the right to grieve. I think I'm doing it now.'

'Jude,' he murmured, stroking her hair.

She spoke out loud the thought that had dogged her through the months after her miscarriage.

'Maybe I would be as bad a mother as I am a wife.'

'No, Jude. You're a much better wife than David is a husband.'

She stared at him, puzzled.

'Why do you say that?' she asked.

'I just think David's selfish in a way you're not.'

'But I've committed adultery twice,' she reminded him. 'Admittedly with the same man.'

'And how do you know he hasn't?'

Jude stared into Gabriele's eyes.

'I don't. Do you?'

He shrugged.

'Eh, who knows? But you, *cara*, will make a wonderful mother. *Da vero*.'

Jude leant against him, glad of his warmth and loyal support.

'Thank you for bringing me here,' she whispered.

The mist thickened under their feet and a sliver of a pale new moon appeared in the late afternoon sky.

'It's getting late,' he said. 'Better not miss the last boat back to Venice.'

On the *vaporetto* Gabriele asked Jude about her future plans. She stared at the dark waters under the boat and shrugged.

'I don't know.'

'But your radio programme, Jude?'

'I asked for a year off and they gave it me. The option's

there to go back but . . .' Her voice trailed away. 'My heart's not in it any more.'

Staring at her brooding face, Gabriele suddenly had a brainwave.

'Work with me, Jude.'

'With *you?*' she asked, astonished. 'I don't know a thing about art restoration.'

'But you're a good administrator. You could help in a thousand ways. And,' he added persuasively, 'it would really improve your Italian. Though I warn you, we only have funding for works of art, not people.'

Jude smiled, a big, excited smile that made her look very young.

'I'd love to.'

He grasped her hand.

'It's a deal.'

'Yes – and I come free,' she added with a happy laugh.

The sea mist was swirling all over the city when they got back to Venice. Jude was glad she had Gabriele to guide her through the twisting alleyways of the Cannaregio district. They parted in Piazza San Marco.

'See you in my office tomorrow.'

'That sounds official,' she teased.

'It certainly is,' he replied. '*Buona notte.*'

The Piazza was strangely beautiful in the mist. Music tinkled out of Florian's but became strangely muffled in the damp night air. Lights from the shops were blurred. Even the moon was a ghostly silver. Tonight the city belonged to the sea. The slap and smack of the tide against the marble steps of the piazzetta was menacing rather than rhythmic and, for the first time, Jude had an acute sense of how insecure the island really was.

She hurried home to Calle del Carbon, to the welcoming warmth of her wood-burning stove. Tomorrow she'd be working with Gabriele and, like an explorer, she'd uncover more of the city she'd come to adore.

Chapter Fifteen

That winter in Venice was a time of complete happiness. Gabriele and his team in the Peril San Marco office were bright, energetic and completely devoted to their work. Money arrived from different charities and private organisations which Gabriele had to co ordinate and administer. The size of the donation decided the scope of the restoration work. Huge projects, like the reconstruction of the façade of the Ca' d'Oro were fortunately funded by the Italian government, but out of Gabriele's office came the finance to save hundreds of smaller Venetian treasures.

Jude was immediately involved in the administration of three restoration projects - a Bellini painting in the Accademia Museum, a crumbling marble sculpture in the great church of the Friari, and off the beaten track, in the Cannaregio district, the cleaning and consolidating of the façade of Madonna dell'Orto. Tintoretto was buried there and some of his greatest masterpieces were beautifully restored, by British funding, after the 1966 floods. As Jude covered the sites, often with Gabriele but sometimes on her own, she got to know the skilled craftsmen who spent their working life underpinning crumbling structures on the edge of ruin. Every one Jude worked with had a story to tell, or information and knowledge to share. Daily she built up a wider picture, not only of Venice but of Italy and the Italians too.

'They're so proud of their culture,' she enthused one evening to David, after she'd been out all day with Gabriele. 'And so unlike the English. They know their past, their art, their music, their opera. I love to get them going on the

fine line dividing Verdi and Rossini.' She looked at David and smiled but he didn't pick up her conversation. He'd been annoyed when she told him she was going to work with Gabriele.

'Why him?' he'd snapped.

'Because he's my friend and the work he does is fabulous,' she'd answered defensively.

She didn't want David to keep reacting in a hostile way whenever she mentioned Gabriele; it worried her and brought back too many bitter memories.

'Darling,' she said, moving closer to him on the sofa, 'why does my work with Peril San Marco upset you?' She cringed to hear how deferential she sounded, how ingratiatingly anxious not to upset him. But the truth was, she desperately didn't want to disturb their fragile new peace. God knows they'd both worked hard enough to create it – moving house, country and jobs in an attempt to rebuild their marriage. No way did she want anything to bring back the bad times.

'Jude, it's not the work, it's Gabriele who pisses me off.'

She knew that David would always be insecure about any man she worked with in the future but Gabriele would shoot his prejudices down in flames. She loved him dearly, he was her best friend, her mentor and her confidant, but no way, ever, could he be her lover. Nobody would ever replace Jonathan. That part of her was dead.

As Jude travelled about the city and got to know more and more of its history and traditions, ideas for short stories and newspaper articles sprang to mind. At first she shied nervously away from anything to do with writing – look what her first book had done for her. Destroyed her marriage and broken her heart. But slowly, inevitably, an idea began to form, quite different from *Secrets*. A Venetian thriller, a murder story set in the glorious days of the Republic. She waited, knowing from experience it would develop. It did – sooner than she'd expected.

One icy cold January morning Gabriele took Jude somewhere she'd never heard of the Ospedaletto, a sixteenth-century infirmary originally built for the poor and homeless of the city.

'Primarily the religious order that ran the infirmary took in the *pute picole*, little orphan girls, from off the streets of Venice to save them from prostitution. They taught them useful skills, like how to tend the sick, but best of all they taught the little girls religious music.' He proudly threw open the doors of an enormous room. 'This was their Sala della Musica and we restored it.'

'Oh, it's beautiful,' Jude cried.

'The structure was cracked from top to bottom, the frescoes and stuccowork crumbling with rising damp, and the ground floor was collapsing. We underpinned it and rebuilt it, brick by brick. We lifted the ceilings and the floors, restored all the frescoes on the walls. It's a unique construction. A perfect gem preserved.'

Jude looked about the room, her imagination fired.

'Where did the little girls live?'

'The *derelitti* derelicts as they were known, were housed in the Ospedaletto over there.' He pointed to the hospital buildings off the courtyard. 'There were eventually about a hundred and twenty of them, all living a highly disciplined, almost monastic, life. During the day they worked in the hospital or prayed.'

'Poor sods. Wouldn't it have been more fun living on the streets?'

'No,' Gabriele answered. 'They had music to lighten their load. Orphan boys under the care of religious orders were led through the streets of Venice, chanting sacred hymns to instruct the poor and solicit charity from the rich. The *pute*, the little girls, weren't allowed outside the hospital so they formed a choir and sang plainchant in the chapel on Sunday. They could be heard by the patients in the infirmaries, on either side of the chapel, and before long visitors began

to listen too, intrigued and charmed by this totally new phenomenon. As the fame of the *derelitti* girls grew, so did their repertoire. Their music masters, keen to get in on the action, wrote ever better motets to the glory of God and the dignity of this holy place – I quote their own words,' he added, turning to Jude, but she was miles away.

'Wow, what a story! Little girls with voices like angels.'

'Illustrious visitors to the Republic were entertained here, in the Sala della Musica, and in return for the edifying entertainment left generous donations which went towards the daily running of the Ospedaletto.'

'What an amazing history,' she murmured as she walked around the room, admiring the airy delicacy of the eighteenth-century wall painting, all depicting Olympian gods playing musical instruments. Jude's eye was drawn to the end wall of the room where the god Apollo was shown conducting an orchestra of girls.

'There they are,' she said, carefully studying the girls' faces, some of them barely suppressing expressions of playfulness and curiosity. 'They're lovely, Gabriele.'

'*Da vero*, but nobody was allowed to see them.'

'So how did they sing – from inside a box?' she asked, half joking.

He pointed at two grilles above the end wall.

'From up there they could entertain illustrious guests of the Venetian Republic, but nobody got to see their pure, pretty faces.'

As she gazed at the painting of the girls, Jude's face slowly went a bright pink.

'*Cara, che cosa?*'

'Gabriele!' she cried, grabbing his arm and holding it so tightly he actually gasped in pain. 'My next book. I'm going to write about them,' she said, pointing at the painting of the singing orphans.

'How?' he asked, baffled by her excitement.

'I want to write a thriller. A serial murderer in Venice. The

derelitti girls will be his victims. Oh, Gabriele, thank you, thank you.'

'It sounds sinister to me.'

'It will be weird and scary and packed full of historical detail on the glorious Venetian Republic. Have you got anymore info on the Ospedaletto and the Sala della Musica?'

'*Molto.*'

'Take me to it,' she said, heading for the door. 'I'll be back, my little *pute*,' she promised as Gabriele locked the door behind them.

That week Jude started to make notes, which grew and grew and grew. She got masses of detailed information from Gabriele but needed more, from the university library. That meant asking Beata, whom she hadn't seen since she'd started working with Gabriele. It also meant coming clean with David about her latest idea. No way was she reliving history, this time he'd know everything – from day one. She picked her moment carefully, while they were walking on the Lido beach one icy cold afternoon in early-February.

'David, I'm thinking of writing another book.'

He stiffened and, letting go of her hand, bent down to pick up a pebble which he threw into the sea. She waited till the stone sank under the waves and said, 'It's a murder mystery, set in the past, about the corruption of the Venetian Republic.'

She stopped short as he grabbed hold of her arms. 'Jude. Your last book almost destroyed us.'

'It wasn't the book, David, it was Jonathan,' she reminded him flatly.

'Knowing your unerring talent for creating success, this one's bound to hit the same dizzy heights. MGM will probably commission fucking Jonathan to direct it.'

'David, please stop,' she begged, near to tears. 'I've never resented your work. Quite the opposite, I welcome it when it makes you happy.'

'It doesn't make me have affairs,' he snapped as he walked off.

Jude followed him, along the tideline.

'What if you should get pregnant?' he asked.

Here we go again, she thought.

'I'm not pregnant.'

'I know.'

'We've been trying for a long time now.'

'I know.'

'Why don't you go and have some tests done, at the hospital in Padua? It's supposed to be one of the best in the north of Italy.'

Jude shook her head.

'I'd prefer to wait till we go back to Cambridge.'

'But that's five months away,' he complained.

'David, I'm frightened, can't you understand that?'

He scowled and kicked a washed up plastic bottle into the crashing waves. They walked on in silence and when they passed Beata's house on the promenade, Jude said, 'Let's call in and see her?'

'No,' he answered sharply.

'Am I that unpopular?'

'She's a bit put out that you took up with Gabriele.'

'Oh, for God's sake! I thought she was an intelligent woman,' Jude fumed. 'What did the guy do that was so bad?'

David shrugged and didn't answer. Great, she thought. I side-stepped one minefield then walked straight into another. On a street corner Jude bought a bag of roast chestnuts from a gypsy woman. She offered them to David but he refused and sulked all the way back to Venice. Sitting by herself on the *motonave*, Jude stared out across the clear lagoon, at the winter sky so piercingly blue it hurt her eyes. She realised as the boat chugged into the Riva degli Schiavoni that she hadn't told David the title of her book.

'*The Voices of Angels*,' she said to a bunch of screeching

seagulls wheeling overhead, and immediately felt a whole lot happier.

When Gabriele suggested Jude give up her work at the Peril San Marco office, just while she got the book started, she refused point blank.

'No way,' she cried. 'You're the life-blood I need for the story.'

'But how can you do the book justice if you're trailing me or translating letters for Giorgio all day?'

'Gabriele,' she said, posing like a media woman, 'I'm a multi-faceted genius, believe me.'

'As we say in the Veneto – kiss my ass!'

Laughing, they began the day's work, writing up a news letter for all their sponsors around the world. Jude couldn't have given up her work in the Peril San Marco office. Gabriele's team were vibrant, vivid, full of an urgent energy that was utterly compelling. More importantly, they were an endless fund of knowledge. As the story took shape and started to firm up in her mind Jude needed masses of information on the Venetian Republic. Giorgio told her of the destruction of Constantinople and the sacking of its priceless treasures, half of which were transported back to Venice. Sergio told her of the Sea State of Venice, when the Empire wielded great international power, controlling a chain of strategically important strongholds along the trade routes. Dante knew all about Venice's slave and spice trade and lent her books on the conflict between Venice and the Church of Rome which went on for centuries. Fascinated Jude made copious historical notes which were eventually to form the foundation for her novel.

Gabriele made arrangements for Jude to visit the Sala della Musica any time. Standing alone, she would gaze around the room and imagine an illustrious audience. Doges, Popes, Cardinals and Emperors, splendid in their robes of silk, ermine and gold, listening to the voices of the *dendtti*

When she closed her eyes she could almost hear their oratarios, the pure, clear notes floating out from behind the dark grilles. Virgin voices of little girls hidden lest they should fire their visitors to sin and temptation. As Jude's imagination took over the story one man entered the innocent world behind the screen, a cleric she semi-invented, Bishop Amerigo Candiano. Rich, corrupt, with a penchant for little girls, he lured his virgin victims to his bed and then to a cold death in the dark lagoon.

As the plot grew in Jude's mind she shivered with horror and itched for pen and paper. Taking her notepad out of her bag, she sat on the floor of the Sala della Musica and started to write. The opening came thick and fast as the characters poured out of her. Being there, close to the source, she could almost feel the spirits of the girls and hear the lingering notes of their polyphonic Latin vespers. Jude realised, as she left the Ospedaletto and hurried back to San Marco, that David was right. The book would indeed truly possess her.

That night, sitting by her stove, she drafted out her outline chapters, letting the story lead to its own conclusion. There were a few blanks but she liked that; her characters needed space to stretch and grow within the story. David was working late so she grabbed some bread and cheese for supper and continued writing. Nervous to start with, she wrote the first chapter which gripped her till three in the morning. By that time she was too tense and over-excited to go to bed. Often at night when she couldn't sleep she'd go for a walk around San Marco. Venice was strangely safe and she'd never felt frightened or threatened by anybody on her nocturnal rambles. Tonight she felt too spooked by her story to go out. Instead she stepped on to her balcony and gazed down on to the Grand Canal, still busy with taxis. Even a *vaporetto* chugged under the Rialto and moored up outside the Municipio for the night. When the campanili from across the city struck four Jude

took herself off to bed and dreamt all night of the cold, dark lagoon.

She worked all day and wrote at night. It was a good balance for Jude, who needed physical activity and lots of social interaction. By early-evening she was ready to sit down and write for hours at a time. She'd moved on from the pen and paper stage to her word processor. As she sat and typed out her outline David worked at the table opposite her, typing out his notes for the Goldoni book he was preparing for his publishers. For all of his grumbling about her book, these evenings together were quiet and contented. When they were both too tired to work they curled up on the sofa and drank Grappa.

Spring in Venice didn't come with a flush of green and a host of daffodils. It came with the light. The days lengthened and the cold sea mists faded on the breeze. Slowly, the tourists returned and Jude knew spring was really upon them when she saw the first flotillas of gondolas once more blocking up the canal under the Rialto Bridge. Every night as she sat and wrote, she heard 'O Sole Mio' sung loudly and poignantly from a passing gondola, always accompanied by a jingling concertina. As the tourists increased so did the singers' repertoire, from Verdi and Puccini to 'Arrivederci Roma' and 'Mama'. To these romantic serenades Jude finished the outline of her book and the first two chapters, which she promptly posted to Rose Traverse at Hibbs.

Easter was a busy time. They had visitors from England then Jude and David travelled south to Florence, Siena and the rest of Tuscany. She enjoyed her holiday – the glories of Michelangelo and the Uffizi in Florence, the delicate beauty of Siena and its stunning cathedral – but most of all she loved the rolling Tuscan countryside and the wonderful hill towns along the Valle di Chianti. Jude realised, as she wandered through fields fragrant with wild herbs and loud with birdsong, that she missed the land. Living on the sea

she'd become accustomed to an environment of sky, light and water; in Tuscany she rediscovered grass, footpaths and trees. Nevertheless, she was delighted to return to Venice and the homely comforts of Calle del Carbon.

It was just after the Easter break that Rose phoned from London.

'Jude. Were've you been?'

'Tuscany. How are you, Rose?'

'Great, just great,' she answered excitedly. 'Jude, I'm coming over to Venice.'

'What for?'

'*The Voices of Angels*. Jude, it's a winner!'

Jude met Rose at Marco Polo airport then treated them both to a taxi back across the lagoon, coming into Venice past San Giorgio and alighting at the piazzetta outside the Doges' Palace in San Marco. Rose was gobsmacked.

'I've been to Venice before,' she said, staring up at the Bridge of Sighs. 'But never this way.'

Jude took her bag and walked Rose across the main square then into the narrow little alleyways, over looping bridges, to the Rialto and home. The four flights of stairs nearly killed Rose but when she did get her breath back she never stopped talking. In the two days she stayed they thrashed out the outline in the most minute detail, going through the main characters, checking and rechecking Jude's historical data. When they were both satisfied with the story, Rose talked deadlines and contracts.

'When can you finish it?' she asked.

Without pausing to think Jude answered, 'By July, before I leave Venice.'

'Are you sure?' Rose asked, not at all convinced such a tight deadline was possible.

'It has to be finished before I leave,' Jude insisted. 'It came out of this city, it belongs here.'

Jude was initially too excited to notice David's disquiet.

When she did, over supper on the second and final evening of Rose's visit, she was mortified.

'Darling, I'm sorry,' she said as soon as they were in bed that night. 'I hadn't realised how awkward it would be for you with Rose here.'

He grunted and answered, 'Yes, it's difficult to relate to somebody who's entertained both your wife and her lover in your absence.'

Jude, stung by his bitterness, said in her own self-defence, 'It is business, you know. Good business too.'

He rolled away from her side of the bed and stared at the wall.

'Seeing her again, mapping out your future, really pisses me off.'

'David, I can't change my publishers just because you don't like my editor. Hibbs do have the right of first refusal on my next book, you know.'

He didn't answer but the atmosphere in the dark room grew thick with tension.

Oh, God, Jude prayed. Please don't let him start all this again.

As if in answer to her prayers David rolled over and held her tight.

'I want you to have our baby – and *then* write.'

Jude sighed.

'David, I could be sitting around for years, waiting to get pregnant. I'd go mad doing nothing.'

'If you'd had those bloody tests in Padua you might be pregnant right now.'

'Sweetheart, I'll be seeing Tom in Cambridge, just as soon as we get home,' she placated. 'He'll sort me out in no time.'

'No he fucking won't!' David yelled, suddenly furious. 'You'll be *writing*,' he mocked.

'And how does writing block up my ovaries?' she seethed.

'It blocks up here,' he said, tapping his forehead with his

finger. 'It takes over your brain, your entire fucking psyche. You haven't a thought in your head, apart from book launches and TV chat shows.'

'You bastard, David! That's not true.'

He stormed out of the room, slamming the door hard behind him. The next morning he was gone, in the same peevish manner, with a loud bang of the front door to mark his exit.

'Sorry,' Jude said, shame-faced.

'No sweat,' Rose cheerfully replied. 'I couldn't help but get the general drift of last night's row.'

'You do surprise me,' Jude joked.

'Well, let's put our cards on the table. How are you going to write the book with that kind of resentment building up?'

'Rose, listen to me,' Jude commanded, her grey eyes suddenly the colour of cold steel. 'If I have to camp out in Gabriele's office to avoid David, I will write the book. It's taken flight – it has to be written.'

'Am I arguing? It's the best thing I've read in years. I'm just worried about David.'

'So am I,' Jude sighed. 'He hates me writing.'

'I've seen it before in partners,' Rose replied. 'They suddenly get insecure, jealous, resentful, angry and possessive. Maybe David does simply want you to have his child,' she added wisely.

'Fine,' Jude exclaimed. 'I'm trying, I'm trying. He'd just like me to sit around thinking of nothing but conceiving. It's insane, Rose. I must work.'

'Yes,' she agreed. 'But I think you're taking on a lot, Jude.'

'We'll see,' she answered, forcing an optimism she didn't actually feel.

Rose was right. It was hard, living with David, once again in a grump because she was writing a book, but the book *demanded* to be written. Every time she visited the Sala

della Musica something compelled her straight towards the screens. As she stood beneath them she could almost hear the *derelitti* clearing their throats and suppressing their nervous giggles. In her imagination the music started, then the singing: '*Salve Regina*' in Latin plainchant rose in a rapture of purity and grace, flooding her head and drenching her senses with its sweetness. Each of her victims now had a name which she'd taken from the hospital records: Angelica, Serafina, Raffaela, Ottavia, Maddalena, Graziella. Smiling little girls, barely out of babyhood. Cherubic rosy cheeks, tumbled hair, chubby limbs, soft white skin, and eyes so innocent the Devil would turn from them. Jude became fixated by them, yearned to see them, touch them, hold them. Mother them. All she could do was whisper their names and write her story. With a burning zeal Jude wrote and only Gabriele knew the force of her need.

'*Cara*,' he said one day when she came into the office with great dark rings under her eyes, 'it is only a story.'

'When I'm in that chapel, it all feels true,' she answered.

He patted her hand.

'*Va bene*, Jude. I'm only worried that it's exhausting you.'

She flung her bag on to the desk and slumped into a chair.

'You're telling me to take it easy and David's not speaking to me. What do I do?' she cried, near to tears. 'Take up tatting?'

'I'm sorry, Jude,' Gabriele apologised. 'Finish your book. It needs to be written.'

Before Jude's contract was signed she asked that everything went to Peril San Marco.

'*Cara*,' Gabriele protested, 'it's too much.'

Jude laughed.

'Gabriele, you've always said there's never enough money

to go round. Why complain about a donation given with love?'

'Because it's you.'

She waved her hand dismissively.

'We're going to have a party,' she said.

Throwing caution to the wind Jude decided to hold the party on Torcello, at Cipriani's. She invited all her colleagues and new friends, even the Egg Man from the Pescheria who politely refused but gave her six free eggs and a kiss. Beata too refused, as did David.

'I want my wife back not another fucking book launch!'

Jude didn't bother arguing with him or even trying to persuade him to change his mind. She was actually quite relieved he wasn't coming, Beata too. They didn't belong.

Cipriani's offered her a Sunday afternoon buffet on the last weekend in May. Fifty of them took the *vaporetto* from the Zattere, across a lagoon dappled with sunshine. Laughter floated on the breeze as they all chatted and joked, changing places on the boat to talk to one another.

'Do you remember the last time we made this journey out across the lagoon?' Jude said to Gabriele, as they leant against the rails, watching Murano disappear in a hot blue haze. 'We were both so melancholic.'

'Oh, *cara*,' he sighed. 'This year with you has been so good.'

She put her arm around his shoulders and kissed him.

'Gabriele, you gave me a new life and a wonderful story to write.'

'*E niente*,' he answered lightly. 'We've had you all year. Beautiful Jude, that's what they call you in the office. *Bellissima*. What will we do when you go?'

'Save Venice. I'll be back to check you're spending my money appropriately.'

'It's so generous of you to give us everything from the book,' he added.

'I'm still making good royalties from *Secrets*, and I had a vast amount from the BBC for the television adaptation of the book which I've never touched.'

'Buy a flat in Venice,' he said, half jokingly.

Jude looked at him and smiled.

'You know, I might just do that.'

It was a wonderful afternoon. The sun grew hotter and hotter, swallows wheeled and dived around Torcello, dense with thickets now a soft pale green. In procession, with Jude leading the way, they walked along the winding path to the restaurant where a sumptuous buffet was laid out in the gardens, under cream canvas awnings. Bigoli, a Venetian pasta speciality, in anchovy sauce and gnocchi. Risotto nero, a wonderful rice dish made with cuttlefish. Seafood pancakes, polenta with mushrooms, baked scallops and monkfish. Chicken cooked in lemon and beef in mustard sauce. It was a Venetian banquet which they enjoyed with the best Veneto wines, Bardolino and Pinot Grigio. After dessert, tiramisù and mouthwatering fruits, glasses of Prosecco, a light sparkling local wine, were handed around. Gabrielle raised his glass and said, 'To Jude, *la bellissima*, *Grazie tanto. Salute*!'

It was a long, languid lunch which went on for most of the day. Towards early-evening Jude and Giorgio wandered over to the cathedral which was chillingly cold and very dark after the bright, glaring heat of the day. Giorgio, who'd been involved in the extensive restoration work on the Annunciation mosaic, cast a critical eye over his craftsmanship, leaving Jude to wander alone down the nave. She knelt in front of the tragically fated Madonna and stared again into her dark, frightened eyes. As she gazed the strangest sensation overwhelmed her - she felt suddenly drenched in Jonathan's love. It coursed through her, filling her with such peace and contentment she wept.

'Oh, my darling, my darling,' she sobbed quietly into her hands. She knew now with agonising clarity what a terrible

mistake she'd made. Staying with David hadn't worked – nothing had worked, not even her attempt to have a baby. So why didn't she just give up now and walk out on him? Staring up at the Virgin, one hand raised in a gentle salute, the other held over her womb, she knew with a blinding certainty that she *had* to stay. She wanted his child.

'Now's the right time,' she said out loud. 'I can be a good mother. Oh, please, let me have a baby.'

When Giorgio found her weeping he put his hand on her shoulder and patted her gently.

'Sometimes it is good to be sad,' he said with an expressive shrug.

Driven by an indefatigable force Jude finished *The Voices of Angels* a week before she and David were due to leave Venice. Taking the final manuscript she walked through the streets to the Sala della Musica and laid it underneath the orphan girls' grille.

'Angelica, Serafina, Ottavia, Maddalena, Raffaella and Graziella, this is for you.'

With their blessings she posted it express to Rose in London then turned her attention to the wearisome business of packing up her lovely home in Calle del Carbon. Standing on a chair, unhooking the muslin curtains from the balcony windows, Jude gazed down on the Grand Canal, dense with traffic and steaming hot on a blazing July afternoon. Suddenly she knew with absolute certainty that she could not give up the flat. Gabriele's words rang in her head.

'Buy a place in Venice,' he'd suggested.

Climbing down the ladder, Jude picked up the phone and spoke to the landlord. Two hours later she was in his office, striking a bargain to buy the flat. By seven that night the deal was done and the money was being transferred from her bank account in Cambridge to his in Venice.

When they left, five days later, David didn't know that his wife now owned Calle del Carbon, but neither did Jude know that Beata was his lover and was four months pregnant with David's baby.

Chapter Sixteen

On her return to Cambridge Jude immediately saw Tom who arranged for her to have some gynaecological tests done at Addenbrookes hospital. In between waiting for the results and her next appointment with him, Jude fell pregnant. When she went back to Tom's surgery she was smiling like a cat that had the cream.

'I've got the results of your tests,' he said, flicking through his notes.

'I don't need them,' she said, 'I'm pregnant.'

Tom smiled at her radiantly happy face

'Isn't it wonderful?' Jude sighed. 'It's as if my body was waiting for me to come home.'

'It is wonderful,' he agreed. 'But don't overdo it. It's important you take it easy in these early months.'

'Take it easy is all I can do,' she answered. 'I've no job, the book's finished. The hardest task I have ahead of me is proof-reading it.'

'When's the publication date?' Tom asked.

'March, but I'm so much more excited about the baby than the book.'

'It should be a good year for you, Jude. Actually, it looks like it might be quite a good one for me too.' He paused rather self consciously. 'My wife's pregnant too.'

'Lucy? Tom, why didn't you tell me sooner?' she said, skipping round the corner of the desk and hugging him

'Any sooner would have been before conception. It's due in July.'

'We'll have our babies about the same time,' Jude said excitedly.

'How nice,' Tom teased. 'You and Lucy can swop layette patterns to your heart's content!'

Jude threw his prescription pad up in the air and headed for the door.

"Bye, doctor. I'm off to congratulate the mother of your child.'

As the door closed behind her the smile on Tom's face faded. He was worried about Jude. It was vital that things went well; a second miscarriage would be disastrous for a woman so deeply in need of a baby. He would do everything he could, both as Jude's doctor and her friend, to monitor the pregnancy and give her the best treatment and advice. He only wished he could do the same for David, who seemed uncharacteristically quiet and withdrawn these days. Perhaps he was playing it cool after the pain of losing the first baby, Tom reasoned, but even that didn't ease his worries. David had returned to Cambridge worse than when he'd left over a year ago. Jude, on the other hand, had come back vibrant and beautiful, with a new book under her belt and a baby on the way. The year in Venice had worked for Jude, clearly not for David.

That night Jude told David and he was visibly shaken. He slumped in his chair, a ghastly white, and said, 'Jude, are you sure?'

Interpreting his reaction as one of shock, she sat beside him and stroked his arm.

'Darling, of course I'm sure.'

'But Tom's only just got the gynaecological results back.'

'I know, but I didn't need them,' she answered, slightly impatient. 'I'm pregnant. Aren't you pleased?'

'Of course I am, my love,' he said, pulling her into his arms and kissing her. As Jude hugged him she could see there were tears in his eyes.

'I know it's a shock,' she said, gently stroking his cheek. 'I

was surprised too, but it felt like my body was waiting for the right time. Now *is* the time, David,' she assured him. 'And this pregnancy will be good, I know it.'

She was right too. From the word go she felt well and looked marvellous. She got to know Lucy, Tom's wife, much better. Previously they'd met at rather formal dinner parties and Lucy, a successful lawyer, had been rather cool and aloof. Now she was a different woman. Deliriously happy and excited about her baby but plagued by morning sickness, Lucy really looked forward to Jude's visit. Laughing at each other's unashamed, obsessive delight in their pregnancy, they swopped notes every day on their varying conditions. They went through umpteen pregnancy books together, torn between laughing and crying as they studied the various diagrams on the different stages of labour.

'Oh, God, Lucy. They all look agony,' Jude wailed.

'Who cares?' She sighed as they stared at a series of photographs showing a new-born baby, exhausted by the trauma of birth, asleep on its mother's belly. Jude nodded, her eyes big with tears.

'I just can't wait,' she whispered.

'Neither can I.'

Those happy afternoons with Lucy made up for David's lack of joy. Like Tom, Jude thought he was holding back because he was afraid, but as the weeks went by and she bloomed before his eyes, she realised there was more to it than that. He was tense and withdrawn and she began to wonder if he was having problems with his work. His bright academic star wasn't soaring quite so fast or so high as it had been. Even Jude, in her state of complete bovine bliss, noticed that he hardly went into King's these days. He told her he preferred working in his own study at home, but there was no evidence of any work being done there.

Desperate to energise and inspire him, Jude threw herself into reconstructing the successful Cambridge life they'd previously enjoyed together. She arranged big dinner parties every

weekend, for David's colleagues in King's and the English faculty. Once again the house buzzed with interesting guests but despite all her efforts nothing worked. She sat at one end of the table, trying to make things happen; he sat at the other, perfectly polite but completely impassive. Eventually Jude gave up the social façade and David was visibly relieved by her decision.

'I'm sorry, love,' he said. 'I'm just not up to that kind of stuff these days.'

'David,' she started hesitantly, 'are you all right?'

'Fine,' he answered.

'Well, you really don't look it.'

He was underweight and pale, with dark, heavy eyes. Even his thick golden hair was thinning at the temples.

'I'm just tired,' he answered.

The only thing that cheered him up were his now regular visits to Venice. Since their return to England in July he'd been back twice, to do research. He always came back happy and lively but it was short-lived. Within a few days he was shrouded in his habitual Cambridge gloom.

Jude was not surprised when she got a phone call from the Master of King's in late-November.

'Come for tea?' he said.

She went under no illusion that this was a happy little college chit-chat.

'It's David I want to talk about,' the Master said as he poured Darjeeling from a Georgian silver teapot. 'We're old friends, Jude, and I won't beat about the bush – what in God's name is wrong with him these days?'

'I'm as baffled as you are,' she admitted.

'He's not the same man,' the Master continued. 'He's lost all his old energy and charm, doesn't seem to have a literary thought in his head. Hardly turns up for college functions, doesn't show a jot of interest in his students.' He sighed heavily as he put down his cup and saucer. 'You know better than anyone that David was – still is – ' he quickly added,

'– very special to me.' Jude nodded. 'Surely I can ask what went wrong in Venice?'

'It was good, for both of us.' She didn't add how their year away had turned sour towards the end. 'David started working again.' The Master looked blank. 'Surely he must have talked to you about his new project?'

'Never mentioned it.'

Jude couldn't believe she was hearing right.

'Are you sure?'

'Absolutely.'

She frowned.

'Well, he's writing a book on Carlo Goldoni. He's been to Venice several times this term, working on translations in the university library.'

'Unfortunately that leads me on to my next worry,' the Master said. 'David's taking a lot of time off. Cancelling tutorials, not turning up for academic board meetings, he even missed a lecture last week.'

Jude carefully set down her cup and saucer before her shaking hand betrayed her growing alarm.

'I had no idea,' she said, white-faced with shock. 'I must admit my thoughts have been elsewhere recently.'

The Master smiled.

'Of course, my dear. David must be delighted at the prospect of a new baby.'

'Thrilled,' she lied. 'Though he is, quite naturally, a little nervous after what happened last time.' She paused then added, 'I've put a lot of his strange behaviour down to his being concerned.'

The Master nodded understandingly

'He was distraught when I miscarried last year,' she reminded him.

'I'd never thought of that,' the Master said. 'Poor chap, he must be under immense pressure.'

She sighed with relief. At least she'd managed to salvage some of David's dwindling credibility.

'But I have to tell you, Jude,' the Master continued on a firmer note, 'it's impossible for me to short-list David for the senior position coming up in college next term.' Jude didn't argue with his decision for a minute. She wouldn't trust David with a Sainsbury's shopping list, never mind a prestigious position in King's. 'He clearly can't take on any more responsibility, he can hardly cope with what he's got as it is.' The Master shrugged and tried to smile. 'I'd always hoped that before I retired I'd see David take the Professor's Chair in the English faculty. Apparently it's not to be. Such a great waste of talent.'

They finished their tea with some polite talk about babies then Jude left, her mind buzzing with anxiety. It was dark when she walked out of the Master's lodge and she felt too restless to go home. Seeing the lights on in the chapel she walked in and took a pew at the back. The wind blowing outside sneaked down the nave and curled up her legs, making her shiver. She pulled her coat tightly around her and listened to the choristers practising their pieces for Evensong. Their pure, clear voices floated up the nave and hung on a whisper in the ornate vaulted roof. It was impossible not to remember her first visit to King's Chapel, with David, nearly ten years ago. They'd sat, hand in hand, listening to the choristers, watching the light fire the stained glass Crucifixion over the high altar into a blaze of ruby, emerald, amethyst and gold. As she remembered, the setting sun fired the east window then sank low and left the chapel to its November gloom. Jude instinctively laid her hand across her soft belly. This time there was no David to catch hold of, but she did have her baby. A tiny pulse of life lay under her hand which she loved with a passion that was beyond all words. Surely, surely, this child would bring joy into David's life?

That night as he left his study, tired and bleary-eyed, Jude said, 'Drink?'

He nodded and followed her downstairs to the lounge where a log fire crackled cheerfully in the hearth. Jude handed him a

large malt whisky then sat down close beside him. She was uncomfortably aware of him moving slightly away from her.

'How's the book going?' she asked cheerfully.

'OK.' He sipped his whisky. 'I might have to go to Venice next weekend.'

It was the cue that she needed.

'Darling,' she started, 'I had tea with the Master this afternoon.' She felt him stiffen and this time he didn't even try to disguise the fact that he was moving away from her.

'And?' he asked brusquely.

'He's worried about you, David.'

He snorted into his glass before he took another pull.

'You mean he's feeling bad because he's refused to short-list me for the senior post coming up in college?'

'Yes, but he's also worried about you. He says you're hardly there these days.'

'I'm working at home,' he answered defensively.

'David, it's obvious there's something wrong. Why won't you talk about it?'

He swirled his whisky in the bottom of the glass.

'Please,' she murmured, reaching out for his hand. 'Let me help you.'

Abruptly he stood up and walked to the door where he stopped and said, 'I want to live in Venice.'

Jude jumped to her feet, her face bright with excitement

'Then let's do it. It would be a great place for the baby to grow up.'

The word 'baby' visibly shook him.

'Sweetheart,' she said, hurrying across the room, 'this baby will be fine, believe me. There's nothing to worry about.'

'No, no,' he exclaimed, and pushing her aside almost ran out of the room. That night, for the first time since their marriage, he slept in the spare bedroom.

Jude's emotions were scattered in all directions. Her mounting anxiety over David contrasted sharply with the elation of being pregnant. Without Tom's and Lucy's support

she would have been lost, especially at the end of the Michaelmas term when David took off for Venice and didn't come back for a week.

'I'm sure he's having a breakdown,' she told Lucy one cold afternoon in early-December.

Lucy nodded. She and Tom had gone way beyond the stage of trying to understand David's behaviour, they were just appalled by it.

'Jude,' she started cautiously, 'have you ever thought he might be having an affair with some woman in Venice?'

'Yes – that or a breakdown.'

Lucy stared at her, stunned.

'You sound almost resigned,' she cried. 'Aren't you bothered?'

'Of course, but I can't judge him. Not after what I did.'

'Isn't there somebody in Venice you could talk to about David?' Lucy suggested.

'Yes, Beata . . .' Jude's voice tailed away as the penny dropped. 'Except she's probably the one he's having the affair with.'

Lucy shook her head. 'I couldn't bear it,' she cried. 'Especially now – ' She stopped short as tears slowly trickled down Jude's face. 'Oh, I'm sorry,' she cried, grabbing her hand and squeezing it. 'Forgive me.'

Jude leant against her and sobbed. 'Our marriage has been a failure for years and it's all my fault.'

Lucy held her until she'd stopped sobbing then said, very firmly, 'No, this time it's not *your* fault. Everybody agrees that David's behaving appallingly.'

When she got home Jude felt like going to bed and burying her misery under the duvet but what would that achieve? Determined to do something she picked up the phone and dialled Beata's number in Venice only to discover it was a dead line. Puzzled she dialled the operator who told her the line had been disconnected. Jude then tried international directory inquiries and discovered that Beata was ex-directory. With

the bit firmly between her teeth, Jude phoned the University in Venice and asked to speak to Beata. She was told la Professoressa was on leave and wouldn't be back at work until the spring. Baffled, Jude phoned Gabriele.

'*Carissima*,' he said. '*Come va?*'

'Bad,' she answered glumly. '*Molto male*.'

'The baby, Jude?' he asked anxiously. 'It's fine?'

'Yes,' she said with a smile. 'It's David who's the problem. Gabriele, have you any idea what he's up to?'

There was a long awkward pause.

'Don't be afraid to tell me the truth,' she said. 'I've worked out he's either having an affair or a breakdown. I just wish I knew which.' The question hung there, waiting to be answered

'Jude, I never see David in Venice.'

'What about Beata, do you see her?'

'Rarely, and she always ignores me,' he replied.

Another long silence followed and Jude realised she'd gone too far.

'I'm sorry, Gabriele,' she said, and quickly rang off.

When she had her next ante-natal appointment Tom was concerned about her.

'You've lost weight, Jude, and you're very pale,' he said rather sharply. Seeing her startled expression he stopped and apologised. 'I'm sorry, but you have to put yourself first. Worrying about David isn't going to help the baby, you know.'

Tom's strong words made sense. Jude was sick and tired of worrying about David. The baby growing inside her must be her absolute priority, not a depressive, absentee husband. She decided it was time to concentrate only on the baby. First she painted its bedroom then made curtains and a patchwork cot quilt, decorated with lions and tigers. As Christmas set in she got very excited and made Christmas puddings and mincemeat for the first time ever. She hung decorations all over the house and bought a pretty tree for the entrance hall. The house looked lovely,

but there was rarely anybody there, apart from Jude, to enjoy it.

Halfway through December, Rose came to stay for the weekend, primarily to talk about the book. Self-sufficient as she was, Jude had been too long starved of company and it was a real treat having a friend to stay, especially somebody as lively and dynamic as Rose. When she produced a rough copy of *The Voices of Angels* from her briefcase Jude was delighted. They'd both agreed the book needed a rich, glossy cover but couldn't agree on what. Finally they'd compromised and commissioned an artist to paint the little *derelitti* girls. The finished piece was stunning and the sight of them, singing to the Doge in the Sala della Musica, reduced Jude to tears.

'I don't know what's wrong with me these days,' she said, wiping her eyes on Rose's hankie.

'It's the hormones,' Rose assured her. 'It'll pass.'

'But I miss the little girls,' Jude sighed, nostalgically remembering her happy writing days in Venice. 'I wish I could write now. It would take my mind off so many things.'

'Don't worry, love,' Rose answered. 'You'll be hitting that word processor just as soon as the baby's born.'

'It's not the baby that's stopping me,' Jude said. 'It's David.'

Rose steered her away from the inexhaustible subject of David and handed Jude a copy of the *Independent* she had in her bag.

'Check out the reviews on page eight.'

Jude turned the pages and stopped when she saw a glamorous photograph of Jonathan with a beautiful woman, rather resembling a younger model of Greta Scaachi. Beside it was a rave review of his latest film.

'I heard he was making a new film,' she said, her eyes hungrily devouring the article. 'It sounds good.'

'It's brilliant,' Rose said. 'I saw the preview last week. It's tipped to win the Cannes Film Festival next year.'

'What's it about?' Jude asked, her eyes riveted by Jonathan's photograph.

'You,' Rose answered, only half-joking.

'Come on, don't tease.'

'The main character's a beautiful woman who walks out on her lover.'

'That sounds pretty mundane,' Jude answered. 'There must be more to it than that to merit this kind of review.'

'It's a brilliant script, fabulous music, wonderful locations and the directing is impeccable. He's really hit the big time with this one.'

The article finished with a tantalising piece about the director's relationship with the dazzling leading lady. Seeing Jude's pensive expression, Rose quickly apologised.

'I'm sorry,' she said. 'That was a crass of me.'

'No,' answered Jude. 'There's not a day passes when I don't think of Jonathan. It's lovely to see his photograph,' she added, her eyes lingering on his much hardened face.

'Why don't you get in touch with him?' Rose asked. 'Just for a professional little chat,' she added persuasively.

Jude smiled.

'Little chats were something Jonathan and I never went in for.'

A few days later David came back from Venice so stressed and irritable Jude made up her mind to spend Christmas at her parents' home in Cumbria.

'You could come too,' she said, curious to see how he'd react.

'Er, yes, maybe. If I can clear my desk by then.'

For the first time she felt like hitting him.

'Do me a favour, David. Just stop lying.'

She paused, hoping he'd do the one thing she most wanted – tell her the truth. He didn't.

It was a wonderful relief to drive away from Cambridge a few days before Christmas. She and Nell, her old friend from

her college days, had exchanged Christmas cards as usual but this time Jude had phoned her and asked if she could call in and see her in Leeds.

'It's a long drive to Cumbria,' she'd said over the phone. 'It would be nice to break the journey and see you.'

'Brilliant,' Nell had cried with her old enthusiasm. 'And I can check out your baby bump.'

The A1 was as ever busy, wet and misty. By the time she got to Leeds Jude's back was sore from sitting hunched up and tense over the wheel. Nell's large Victorian house was a shambles and loud with the excited cries of noisy boys. Nell lived with an Afro-Caribbean doctor and his three young sons, aged two, four and seven. She was six months pregnant with their first child but so fat and contented she actually looked full-term.

'Bloody twins,' she announced as she made tea, toast and Ribena in the huge kitchen, where every wall was decorated from top to bottom with the boys' vivid art work.

'Oh, Nell,' Jude said, laughing at her friend's expression of mock horror. 'It couldn't happen to a nicer person.'

Nell fed the ravenous boys then scooted them into the living room, ankle deep in Lego.

'Little buggers,' she said, shutting the kitchen door on their shouting. 'Now let's have a nice cup of tea and catch up.'

It was just like old times, sitting round the fire, huddled over a pot of tea, laughing and talking. Jude stayed far too long and finished the rest of her journey north in the dark. When she got to Watendlath, late on Christmas Eve, the moon was high over the fells, sparkling on the snowy tops. She parked the car and walked across the farm yard, inhaling the sharp, pure air. The only sounds she could hear were the cows in the byre, the streams bubbling into Watendlath tarn and a vixen's bark from the distant wood. Jude sighed with deep contentment.

'I've come home,' she whispered, and wondered why she hadn't thought of doing so months ago.

It was a wonderful Christmas, happy and relaxed with lots

of visitors, long walks on the fells with her brother Dan, and wonderful farmhouse meals that were especially good after a day spent outdoors.

Jude blossomed. The stress and anxiety fell away from her as she helped Dan with the light work about the farm She'd originally planned a three day holiday but stayed on for the traditional New Year's Eve first footing party in the Borrowdale valley. She phoned David in Cambridge on Christmas Day but he wasn't in so she phoned his mother who told her, in a very surprised voice, that he was in Venice. Oddly enough it was only then that Jude knew with absolute conviction that David was unfaithful to her. She'd kept an odd hope at the back of her mind that he wasn't having an affair, just cracking up, but there was no more deceiving herself. The hopelessness of her marriage finally hit home and Jude was overwhelmed with sadness. She hurried out of the farmhouse and went down to the tarn, where her mother found her weeping.

Taking Jude in her arms she held her tight and whispered, 'Come on, lovie, don't upset yourself over him.'

In between sobbing Jude looked up, astonished. 'Mum, how could you possibly know what I'm crying about?'

'You're weeping over your man, lass,' her mother stated flatly. 'And no wonder. He's not looking after you the way a husband should.'

Jude buried her face against her mother's shoulder. 'He's in Venice,' she whispered. 'I think he's left me.'

Her mother stroked Jude's hair, just as she'd done when Jude was a little girl. 'It's the bairn that must come first with you,' she said firmly.

Jude nodded and wiped her eyes.

'I know, Mum. I want this baby so much.'

'We all do, Jude, that's for sure Now, come on, let's go indoors by the fire before you catch your death of cold '

She followed her mother indoors and drank tea with her in front of the old Aga that always smelt of baking bread.

'What will you do if he has left you?' her mother asked.

Jude didn't hesitate for a minute.

'Come home to Watendlath and have the baby.'

Her mother smiled.

'I can't think of a better place to start a new life.'

They were peaceful days that followed but once the festivities were over Jude knew she had to go home, even if it was only to confront David with the truth. She left one misty January morning and drove to Leeds where she stopped off for lunch with Nell, insisting that she wouldn't stay long as she wanted to be home before nightfall. All went well until she got on to the Huntingdon bypass, where road works were causing a long tailback of heavy traffic. Jude moved into the inside lane, preferring to wait rather than hustle her way past the steaming trucks and lorries. Suddenly there was a flash of lights behind her and a deafening blast on a horn. In her rear mirror she saw a coach heading straight for her. Powerless to go either backwards or forwards, she grabbed the hand brake and pulled it full on before the coach ploughed into her. She heard herself scream before darkness mercifully obliterated the searing pain that shot through her spine and into her belly.

As Jude lost the daughter she would never know, Beata gave birth to David's son in Venice.

Nobody needed to tell Jude she'd miscarried. The warm trickle of blood seeping out of the edges of the sanitary towel pressed between her legs told her everything. Her first visitor was Tom, thankfully without Lucy. Jude stared at him as he held her hand, her eyes wide and dry, her face drawn in an agony of grief.

'Oh, Jude, Jude,' he murmured. 'It was a good pregnancy. You're strong and healthy. Believe me, you'll get pregnant again.'

'How?' she asked hollowly. 'David's having an affair with another woman.'

Tom looked down so that she wouldn't see the anger in his eyes.

'Shall I contact him?'

Jude shook her head.

'No.'

He stayed with her for an hour, stroking her hand and talking to her, then left so that she could get some sleep. Jude didn't sleep, but lay staring, dry-eyed at the white ceiling. She had wanted this baby so much. It had felt strong and beautiful, but now it was slipping out of her, in a slow drip of blood. How could she go on? There were too many mistakes to live with, too many problems, too much pain. Without the baby pulsing new life into her, she was left with only the grim reality of her failed marriage. When she thought of David she felt cold and disgusted. She didn't want him, but how dare he deceive her, and deceive her so blatantly? Anger helped to ease her grief but only temporarily. When it eventually fizzled out Jude was left with only heartache.

When Lucy did visit, Jude took one look at her and the tears she hadn't been able to cry poured out of her. Lucy dropped the flowers she was holding and took Jude into her arms. Rocking her like a child, Lucy wept with her.

'I always felt it was a girl. A strong, beautiful girl,' Jude choked. 'I had a name for her: Gabriella. I used to put my hand over my belly, like this,' she said, laying a shaking hand on her flat stomach, 'and talk to her. About the park and the seaside, about the colours of the leaves and the flowers. I planned things with her, Lucy. Holidays, Christmas, picnics – all sorts of silly, wonderful things. She felt real and vital, she felt like my daughter.'

'She *was* real, Jude,' Lucy cried. 'She'll always be a part of you – always.'

She stayed holding Jude until she fell asleep then gently laid her back on the pillows.

'Poor love,' Lucy murmured, as she stroked the tangled hair off Jude's anguished face. 'Poor, poor love.'

Jude was told she could go home the next day and Lucy suggested she went back to their house. David, however, returned and heard the tragic news from Tom. Putting on his best professional manner helped Tom curb his anger and not punch David, which was what he felt like doing. He almost enjoyed seeing him reel with shock. At least Jude wasn't the only one in pain.

'By the way, you can stop playing silly buggers. Jude guessed long ago you were having an affair. Pity you hadn't the guts or the decency to come clean about it.' He took a long breath to steady himself. 'The main thing now is to nurse her back to health. If you can't stay around long enough to do that, we will,' he snapped.

David brought Jude home from the hospital and put her to bed where she stayed for days and days. She didn't talk to him, didn't ask him any questions, didn't even register he was there. She just wept and wept. Tom became worried about her mental condition as well as her low physical state.

'I can prescribe every drug in the book but what she needs is taking in hand,' he told Lucy. 'David's fucking useless. God, I could hit the bastard every time I see him.'

'Imagine how Jude feels,' Lucy said. 'At least we don't have to live with him.'

'Surely she's got friends who could help?' Tom said. 'That's what she needs. Life, company, work. Anything to get her out of that bed and away from David.'

Lucy suddenly clicked her fingers.

'I know,' she said. 'Claudia Langham. They were best friends for years.'

'Before Jude took up with her fella,' Tom reminded her.

'Well, I'm going to give it a try,' Lucy insisted. 'Claudia's back working for Channel 4. I'll track her down somehow. She can always tell me to piss off and Jude will be none the wiser.'

Claudia didn't tell Lucy to take a hike. Instead she got into her car and drove down to visit Jude. When she knocked on

the front door nobody answered so she went round the back and peeped through the kitchen window. The formerly pretty room looked like a bomb had dropped. There were dirty dishes everywhere, the table was awash with old newspapers, the curtains were half-drawn and dead flowers in dusty vases crumbled on the window ledge. When Claudia tried the back door it was open so she walked upstairs to Jude's bedroom. David was in his study, leaning on the desk with his head in his hands, asleep. Jude lay in tangled mess of sheets, her face swollen and grey, her eyes dead and vacant. In a flash, Claudia was across the room and holding her.

'Jesus God, what's happened to you?' she cried.

Jude stared as if she was a vision from heaven.

'Oh, Claude. I've missed you.'

'Right, my girl – up!'

With a heave Claudia threw the dirty bedding off Jude and pulled her up, shocked rigid by the sight of her thin, wasted body. She led her into the bathroom where she ran a deep, hot bubble bath.

'Get in there, girl, and soak,' she commanded, half laughing.

As Jude lay in the water Claudia washed her hair and her body, gently skimming the sponge over her flabby belly and thin thighs.

'I lost my baby,' she said.

'I know, love. I'm very, very sorry.' She sponged her a little more then added firmly, 'But it's over, Jude, and now you have a life to live.'

An hour later she was washed and dressed and sitting in the kitchen, sipping soup. When David walked in Claudia said, as if they'd only met yesterday, 'You look like shit too.'

She insisted Jude went out for a walk. The sharp February air soon whipped colour into her sunken cheeks.

'I feel better already,' she said, as they sat on a bench by the river and huddled up close together to keep warm. 'Tell

me about you, Claude,' Jude asked, eager for news of the outside world.

'I had the best time ever in New York,' she started. 'The TV show was brilliant and I fell in love. Me, the greatest cynic of all time, got swept off my feet by my *incredibly* sexy producer, who's half my size but adores me.'

'So, why're you back in England?' Jude asked, quickly adding, 'Thank God you are.'

'My work permit ran out and I have to finish my contract with Channel 4. I'll go back to New York in the summer. Might even get married, who knows?'

Jude smiled, delighted that at last Claudia was happy.

'Have you forgiven me?' she murmured.

Claudia nodded.

'Absolutely, kiddo. The question is, have you forgiven yourself? You really blew it, staying with David, you know.'

Jude nodded as she stared into the waters of the Cam.

'I know.'

'What's wrong with him? He looks like he's gone mad.'

'Please, let's not talk about him right now,' Jude answered. 'Have you seen or heard from Jonathan?'

'Certainly I have. I interviewed him on Channel 4 just after New Year. Didn't you see it?' she asked, surprised.

'No, I was in hospital,' Jude reminded her. 'How is he?'

'Older and rather lined but somehow even more sexy and handsome than before. We got ratted together and laughed ourselves silly. He's still the Jonathan we loved and fucked. Arrogant, impatient, passionate and inspired. He's great.' She paused. 'What about you, Jude?'

'Don't ask.'

'Listen, you've got to get back to work or you'll blow away.'

Jude shrugged.

'Come on, think positive. You've got one bestseller to your name and another just about to hit the book shops.'

'Who told you?'

'Rose Traverse, of course. We media women hang out, you know. Get with it, Jude. You should be out there promoting it, in England and Italy.'

Jude's tired eyes brightened.

'I could skip the England bit but I wouldn't mind Italy.'

'Then get out there and peddle some ass!'

They stopped off for tea in town, then bought Jude some new clothes in The Gap.

'Great,' said Claude, turning her around like a mannequin doll. 'Being anorexic suits you. How about a hair cut?'

Jude nodded, excited.

'Yes. Let's change the whole damn' image.'

She had her hair cut into a thick bob that lifted her face and made her look amazingly young and innocent, then on sheer impulse she bought a pair of damson-coloured Doc Martin boots.

'Now you look like the woman I knew,' Claudia said, smiling with delight.

They walked home through King's, past Claudia's old rooms by the river.

'God. It seems like a lifetime ago,' she said.

'Nearly ten years,' Jude said, looking across the lawn to David's college rooms. 'Strange, David only ever wanted a life here in college yet he's just given in his notice. He's having an affair in Venice.'

'Beata?'

'I'm sure it's her.'

'She's had the hots for David since he was a lanky undergrad. Why don't you leave him?' Claudia asked.

'I will, when I get the energy.'

'And do what?'

'I have a secret,' Jude said. 'I never told David but I bought our old flat before we left Venice last summer. I could go back there.'

'What, just to be near Beata and David?' Claudia cried. 'Jude, get real.'

'Yeah, that puts me off,' she admitted. 'But it would be so good to get away from here.' She looked at the cold grey river and the chapel stark against the winter sky.

Claudia stayed for two days and transformed Jude, filling her with new vigour and life. David avoided both of them but Claudia cornered him before she left and talked, straight and hard, just like she had in their old days at King's.

'Are you screwing Beata?'

'Yes.' He stopped and looked at Claudia. 'Does everybody know I've been having an affair?'

'Only those with a brain. Come on, David. Think about it. Regular weekend trips to Venice and a run-away Christmas holiday. A rabid dog could work it out in five minutes. It would be a good idea to decide which woman you want. That's assuming either will have you, the state you're in.'

'I can't leave Jude like this.'

'Why not? The damage is done.'

'I feel racked with guilt. If I'd been here she might never have had that accident.'

Claudia didn't try to ease his guilt. Jude had suffered, so must he.

'She needs to get out of Cambridge. Make a new start, with or without you. She needs to work too, that'll bring her old drive back.'

David nodded but Claudia's next words knocked him for six.

'She's talked of going to Venice.'

'*What?*' he cried, the colour draining from his face.

'Why should she give up Venice just because of you and Beata? It's always been good for her.'

'I wish she'd talk to me but she won't,' he said.

'I don't blame her. You'll have to do the talking this time.'

Jude drove to London with Claudia and visited Rose at Hibbs. She was thin and still weak but her smile was bright and lively. Rose hugged her warmly.

'I'm sorry, love.'

Jude squeezed her hand and said, 'Help me to work, Rose. It's my only salvation.'

After a long conversation Rose phoned the Italian publishers who'd bought the rights to Jude's book and suggested that Jude toured Northern Italy promoting *The Voices of Angels*. The publishers were keen and immediately went for the deal. Within a week they'd set up strategic locations within easy travelling distance of the Veneto and Gabriele, who'd been delighted at the prospect of seeing Jude and promoting the book, had arranged several interviews too.

'It'll be hard work, Jude,' Rose warned. 'Cold too, at that time of the year in Northern Italy.'

'I know, Rose, but it's exactly what I need.'

Jude told David that she would be leaving for Venice at the beginning of February.

'Where will you stay?'

'I have my own flat.'

'Flat? Where?' he gasped.

'I bought Calle del Carbon,' she said with a smile of satisfaction.

'I want to come with you.'

Jude shook her head.

'No.'

'Please?' he begged, almost in tears.

'What for?' she demanded, torn between feeling sorry for him and wanting to smack his face. 'Old time's sake or the convenience of having Beata just across the lagoon?'

'No, because I love you.'

'Both,' she added sadly.

Chapter Seventeen

As the *vaporetto* chugged down the Grand Canal sea mist shrouded the city in a funereal gloom. It was a February afternoon, still light, but not a single building was visible through the mist, which clung to Jude's hair and chilled her face as she stood on deck, peering out for a glimpse of the Byzantine *palazzi* which lined the water like dark shadows Jude would hardly have known they were at the Rialto if the attendant hadn't called out.

Carrying their suitcases Jude and David walked along the Riva, towards the Municipio, then took a sharp left into Calle del Carbon. The acrid smell of cats and sewers in the entrance hall lingered in their nostrils as they made their way up the ninety-two steps to the fourth floor. The moment Jude walked into the flat she knew she'd made a mistake. It was freezing cold and musty, the mist that swirled in the streets below seemed to have crept in with them and seeped icy cold around their ankles.

'I'll try and get the heating started,' David said.

Jude persuaded the wheezy old pot-bellied fire to light, but it obviously resented being neglected so long and blew soot into her face. Coughing and spluttering, she persevered and after half an hour the fire grumbled into life and began to crackle with unexpected cheerfulness. Feeling a lot warmer Jude made her way to the bedroom where her heart sank like a brick. The sight of the double bed where she and David had slept the summer before made her stomach turn right over.

'I'll sleep in the spare room,' she called, lugging her cases into the guest room that overlooked the Municipio. David

didn't argue but brought in the rest of her luggage and left her to unpack.

As darkness fell Jude stood on her balcony and gazed out. The mist still hung like a cloying grey blanket but as she stopped trying so hard to see, the muted noises of the city drifted up to her. The muffled throb of speed boats and *vaporetti*, the steady tip-tap of people walking below, the dull ring of the bells in the *campanili* around the city, and beyond it all the ghostly sound of waves breaking in the lagoon.

'Shall we go out for dinner?' David suggested.

Jude nodded. She certainly didn't want to stay in the flat, alone with David, on this, their first night back in Venice.

The city was strangely empty until they walked into Piazza San Marco where even the bright lights from the expensive jewellery shops around the edges of the square were reduced to a blurred, fuzzy yellow. The restaurants and bars had their doors open to the night, and their golden warm interiors twinkled like treasure caves. Laughter emerged, combined with tinkling piano music and the strains of a poignant violin. Jude had an Alice in Wonderland feeling that if she crossed over their thresholds she'd step into a fantasy world, where Venetian courtiers with painted faces danced in harlequin pantaloons. She reluctantly left the square, which seemed the only place in the city that was able to withstand the mist's funereal dankness. Along the empty Riva degli Schiavoni port lights from the huge *motonave* boats, bound for San Giorgio and the Lido, blinked out across the lagoon. The muffled moan of fog horns drifted in from the sea, like the cry of lost souls in the dark. Jude shivered and quickened her pace.

'Let's get a move on,' she said. 'This is spooky.'

It was a relief to walk into their favourite fish restaurant and find it packed out, loud with laughter and noisy conversation.

'This is better,' David sighed. 'I thought the city had gone and died on us.'

They ordered a carafe of the delicious house white, a fruity Barbarano bianco, that went wonderfully with their main course, squid and sardines. A combination of good company, delicious wine and excellent food made Jude and David suddenly easy and relaxed. The feeling was so unexpected, so sweet and intense, it returned them briefly to the days when they had been happy together. Like all brittle moods it shattered as quickly as it came, but for an hour they saw the people they had been and felt young again.

As they walked out of the restaurant the mist engulfed them and the desolate streets echoed to their clattering footsteps. Just before the Bridge of Sighs, Jude stopped to stare at a half erected children's fairground.

'For Carnevale,' David told her. 'It starts next week.'

The following morning the mist lifted and Venice sparkled in a sea of shimmering blue. Jude took one look at the clear sky and jumped out of bed, quickly pulling on her jeans, jumper and a pair of boots. She ran down the stairs and skipped out into the dazzling bright morning. This was the Venice she adored. Light, busy and bursting with life, she could feel its energy pouring into her as she hurried through the crowded streets to the Pescheria. In the market place she bought oranges and grapefruit, artichokes, cheese, ham, chicken, crispy warm bread and eggs from the Egg Man who smiled with delight to see her once again. Loaded down with shopping, Jude dropped into her favourite bar where she ordered cappuccino and a chocolate brioche. Everybody in the bar welcomed her back and she was there nearly an hour, chatting in slightly halting Italian, to one person after another.

When she got home, her arms aching with carrying the heavy bags of shopping, David had gone out. She knew where he would be but didn't react. They were colluding together in some sort of prolonged, elaborate goodbye. She doubted her own reasons for consenting to it, and his too – maybe it was a mutual dread of that final letting go. Jude had no desire to

brood, she'd done enough of that in Cambridge and Venice, for her, was not a city for regrets. Putting away the shopping, she immediately went out to meet Gabriele in his office in St Mark's Square.

'*Carissima*,' he cried, kissing her on both cheeks then the mouth. 'How are you?' He closely examined her open, smiling face. 'Life comes back, eh?' he murmured.

Jude nodded and leant against him.

'Slowly,' she said. 'But I'll never forget, Gabriele.'

'It would be a sin to forget a life you carried,' he answered tenderly. 'But,' he beamed, 'we have work here for you, *cara*.'

'The more the better,' she said, grateful for his sensitivity and energy.

Between her Italian publishers and Gabriele's many contacts in the North of Italy, Jude had quite an extensive trip ahead of her. He'd suggested right from the start that he should accompany Jude on the tour.

'It's great publicity for Peril San Marco and I can act as your translator – when necessary,' he added with a tactful smile.

Jude was delighted.

'*Perfetto*. You're the best person I can think of to guide me round North Italy.'

Their itinerary started in Milan, then Trento, Verona, Vicenza, Treviso and Padova. The following week they'd move on to Ferrara, Mantua, Ravenna, Modena and Bologna.

Two days later they set off for Milan where Jude talked to a book club then signed copies of *The Voices of Angels* in book shops and department stores around the sprawling industrial city. By evening she was wiped out but they'd had a good day and Gabriele took her to a wonderful Hungarian restaurant for supper. Determined to keep the mood light and bubbling, neither talked of Beata and David. Jude didn't even know if Gabriele was aware that David was having an affair with his ex-lover. Right now was certainly not the time to question him and for her part, Jude was sick of the subject.

The following morning they took off, for a quick sightseeing tour of Milan where Jude saw Leonardo's Last Supper, in the church of Santa Maria della Grazie, and Michelangelo's heartbreaking Pietà in the Castello. They spent so long in the cathedral they nearly missed the train to Verona where Jude gave a talk to a large group of students in the university. Early the next morning, on their way to the city centre, Gabriele took her to a beautiful medieval house with a stone balcony.

'This is *'la Casa di Giulietta'*, he told her. 'Juliet's house. And that's the balcony where she stood and talked to Romeo. The Capulets and the Montagues really did exist in these very streets, you know.'

On the wall beneath Juliet's balcony the quote from Shakespeare was almost obscured by modern graffitti and neon-coloured hearts pierced by Cupid's arrows and kisses

There were two book shops on Jude's itinerary that day, followed by an interview with local radio in the evening. Next they travelled to Vicenza where, in between signing books in several shops, Jude marvelled at the elegant sixteenth-century villas built by the architect Palladio whom Gabriele insisted was Venetian by birth. Towards the end of the week they were in Treviso then Padua, the last town before they returned to Venice for the weekend. Jude loved Padua, with its ancient university where Galileo studied and its wonderful Scrovegni Chapel, decorated with frescoes by Giotto. Best of all was the city's medieval centre, dominated by the Palazzo della Ragione which cut between the two main squares, Piazza della Frutta and Piazza delle Erbe. Jude's first appointment was a talk in the famous Café Pedrocchi, followed by signings then a gallop over to the university where she addressed a group of English students. Wherever she went the audience, intrigued by the accuracy of her historical research, bombarded Jude with questions. She was especially glad of Gabriele's presence when she was asked headbangers like what chemicals were used in the restoration work on the Sala della Musica, and how did Peril San Marco intend

to spend the proceeds from her book? After nearly three hours of speaking, listening and signing books, Jude's head was reeling.

'Can we get a coffee before the television interview?' she whispered to Gabriele.

He nodded and took her across the street to a bar in Piazza della Frutta. They sat outside and drank their coffee in the soft spring sunshine. Children playing in the wide, open square threw off their heavy winter coats and chased the pigeons, hungrily pecking at the fruit left over from the morning market. Jude sighed.

'Tired?' Gabriele asked.

'Tired and happy,' she answered. 'I love your country, Gabriele. It makes my heart sing.'

'Good. Tell that to the camera crew. Here they come.'

It wasn't a difficult interview, standing in the sunshine, talking to the director who was very relaxed and informal. As Gabriele went into his prepared piece on Venice, Jude gazed idly around the square. Suddenly she gasped so loudly the interviewer stopped the tape.

'Are you all right?' he asked.

'I'm fine. Sorry,' she mumbled. 'I swallowed something the wrong way.'

The interview continued but Jude didn't hear a single word. Sitting straight across the *campo* from where she was standing was Lucius Carmichael. Though distinctly older and more solid in his build it was unmistakably him. Oozing wealth and sophistication, he was sitting at a table talking animatedly to what looked like a businessman. Shocked rigid, Jude's eyes bored into him and she began to shake all over. Here was the man who'd walked out on her years ago. The man who'd rejected her love and dumped her for a sex bomb. He had introduced her to sex so glorious she had dreamed of his body for years. The powerful fusion of memories blasted her so hard she reeled. Gabriele caught her before she fell over and the director stopped his tape for the second time.

Seeing her ashen face, Gabriele said, 'I think we'd better wrap it up. She's exhausted.'

'No problem,' said the affable director. 'We've got all we need.'

Jude left Gabriele to do the polite farewells while she watched Lucius, now standing and shaking hands with his companion.

She instinctively moved to follow him. Lucius threaded his way through the people in the square then disappeared under an archway, into a network of narrow medieval streets. Feeling hot and frightened, Jude ran after him and as she ran she felt as if she was chasing the tail end of a long forgotten dream. Memories she'd thought long dead rose up like pale spectres from the past and drenched her with a painful intensity. She could feel him, smell him, remember the weight of his body on hers, the pressure of him between her open thighs. His mouth on hers, his tongue searching for hers, his breath against her neck as he pushed into her and cried out her name – suddenly she stopped running.

'What's the matter with me?' she said out loud.

Passers by stared at her white face and wild eyes.

'*Scusi*,' a man said, as she walked straight into him. Realising she was blocking the pavement, Jude stepped under a portico and leant against the wall, trying to steady her breath. Quarter of an hour later Gabriele found her there.

'*Cara*,' he said, taking her arm. 'What happened?'

Jude stared at him, dazed and confused.

'God knows,' she answered. 'I saw a man in the square who walked out on me, years ago.' She shook her head trying to make some sense out of her crazy reaction to Lucius. 'I couldn't believe it was him. I followed him, then lost him and started to run and run, as if I was chasing the past.' She rubbed her head. 'I think I'm really losing it, Gabriele,' she muttered, close to tears.

He pulled her to him and stroked her hair.

'We've all chased the past, Jude. Sometimes it seems so much safer than the future.'

'Yes, but this guy was a real bastard,' she cried. 'I can't believe he still looks so drop-dead gorgeous,' she added, half laughing at her own stupidity.

By the time they got back to the city centre she was exhausted.

'I've had it, Gabriele,' she said. 'Do you mind if we give the sightseeing a miss and go back to Venice earlier than planned?'

'No problem,' he replied. 'I'm tired too.'

When they stepped off the *vaporetto* at St Mark's Square the first thing they saw were crowds of little children, all dressed up for Carnevale. Jude watched entranced as they skipped over the Bridge of Sighs, giggling and chattering with excitement.

'I'd forgotten,' Gabriele said. 'It's *Martedo Grasso*.'

Jude looked blank.

'The day before Ash Wednesday,' he explained. 'The most important day of Carnevale.'

'Pancake Tuesday,' Jude cried. 'Oh, Gabriele, let's follow the children,' she said, her eyes dancing with excitement.

'OK,' he replied. 'Pity we didn't get dressed up too.'

As the stream of children scurried along the Riva degli Schiavoni, all clapping and dancing, Jude hurried after them, laughing with pleasure. Their costumes were astonishingly good. Clowns and rabbits, spacemen, knights, little devils and angels, all queued up for a ride on the brilliantly lit big wheel. Tiny girls in satin crinolines, with elaborately curled wigs and black lace masks, danced in a circle to the jingling merry go-round music. The fairground was packed and it was difficult to move easily between the roundabouts and the stalls selling masks, fans, paper flowers and flamboyant Carnival hats. It was like the most surreal theatre set, with the golden Basilica of St Mark's, the gondolas and towering campanile

providing the most elegant backdrop to the merry-making. Adults dressed in lavishly beautiful costumes mingled with the giggling children, adding to the swirl of colour and noise along the packed Riva degli Schiavoni. Tinkling music filled the air, combined with laughter and children singing.

Suddenly, close to Jude, a baby started to scream. She instinctively turned towards the child, her womb catching at the anguished cry. As she located the baby, a chubby, healthy little boy, struggling in its mother's arms, she also saw David. He didn't see her. He had eyes only for the baby whom he took and held aloft.

'Giacomo, caro Giacomo, guarda!'

Cuddling the smiling, burbling baby to his chest, he kissed his rosy cheeks and a pain like red-hot steel pierced Jude's heart. She knew with absolute certainty that this child was David's son. Though only a few months old he had exactly the same blue eyes, the same skintone, mouth and nose. His hair was blond and curly, and he stood out among the Italian children with his fair English complexion. The lovely baby held out his chubby, little arms and smiled rapturously at his mother. Beata stepped into the frame, bending to kiss her son's soft golden head. David put his arm about them both and they walked away together, a happy family, enjoying the gaiety of Carnivale. They disappeared and the crowd surged forward, a froth of crinolines, feathers, silver satin and shimmering sequins. Jude felt as if her heart was breaking.

'David's son,' she gasped as she grabbed hold of Gabriele's arm and sank her nails into his flesh. Gabriele held on to her, his face white, his eyes wet with tears. 'His baby. Not *mine*.' A terrible cry broke from her mouth. A cry of pain and outrage, of loss and love, of anger and hatred. Why had David got a baby in his arms, a warm golden baby boy, rosy with health and love, when she had nothing but memories? Sobs ripped through her. She didn't know where she was going, what she was doing, she just wanted to get away. Pushing

her way through the wild singing crowd, Jude battled her way over the Bridge of Sighs and through St Mark's Square, where the crowd was almost impenetrable. Colours merged and heaved, in a nightmare sea of green and red and swimming yellow, as groups gathered to perform classical dances or masked comic sketches. Everywhere she turned Jude saw a laughing, leaping, grotesque character. She wanted to tear at their jeering faces, to rip off their hooked noses and gouge out their painted, mocking eyes.

'For Christ's sake, Gabriele,' she cried, tears streaming down her face. 'Get me home!'

Taking her by the hand he drove a path through the square and finally reached the comparative quiet of the side streets behind San Marco. As they made their way back to Calle del Carbon figures in glittering costumes, with faces painted like the sun and the moon, suddenly burst out of dark archways and ran screaming over the looping bridges, their costumes reflected in the still waters of the dank canals.

'It's like a nightmare,' Jude kept whispering. 'A nightmare.'

She was half-crazed by the time Gabriele got her back to the flat, which was dark and cold. He switched on the lights, sat her on the sofa and put a glass of brandy in her quivering hands, while he quickly lit the fire.

'You knew,' she said, as the fire started to crackle into life.

Gabriele nodded.

'You knew all along, didn't you?'

He nodded again as he poured himself a large brandy.

'They've been lovers for years, Jude. That's why Beata and I split up,' he said, taking a pull of his drink.

'How many years?' she asked, dazed with shock.

'Since they went to California together.'

'That's when I was having an affair with Jonathan!' she cried, wide-eyed with horror. 'He came back and said I'd betrayed him. I *had* betrayed him. He made me choose,

between him and Jonathan, and I chose *him*.' Anger began to burn in her belly, a slow white anger that finally set her heart against David. 'He never mentioned his own betrayal.'

'I couldn't tell you,' murmured Gabriele. 'You were so broken after your miscarriage.'

'He was screwing her then – when we lived here?' she asked, determined to get to the depths of David's infidelity 'Even though we came to Venice to build a new life after I'd lost the baby?'

'Jude, stop it. I don't know every detail of their love making.'

'Sorry,' she said, and immediately asked another question. 'How old's the baby?'

Gabriele shrugged.

'He was born at Christmastime. I know that because a colleague at the university told me '

'That explains why David was back and forth to Venice nearly every weekend.'

'I guess so,' he answered flatly.

'Gabriele, you don't have to guess. You just hold up your fingers and count,' she said, angrily thrusting nine fingers in front of him and counting backwards 'December, November, October, September, August, July, June, May, April Beata was four months pregnant when we left Venice last summer,' she cried hysterically.

'Jude,' Gabriele commanded, his voice firm and strong, 'stop this – you're torturing yourself.'

'I'm in agony,' she shouted. 'I want *my* baby.'

She rose to leave the room but Gabriele pulled her back. Suddenly she was fighting him. Punching at his chest and scratching his arms, she yelled and screamed, 'I want my baby!'

Gabriele tried to hold her but she pushed him away and he slipped over As he fell he caught his head on the metal fire surround and blood poured from a cut on his temple

'Oh, no, Gabriele!' Jude sobbed 'Wait, don't move

'I don't think I can,' he mumbled, as he tried to staunch the gaping wound.

Jude dashed into the kitchen where she grabbed a clean towel and a bowl of hot water. Kneeling at his feet, she bathed the wound and kissed him.

'I'm sorry, I'm so sorry,' she murmured.

'It's OK. Don't worry,' he said, wiping away her tears.

Eventually the blood stopped flowing and Jude bandaged his head and poured more brandy. They sat by the fire and drank themselves silly. When Gabriele bent to kiss her, Jude wasn't at all surprised. It seemed the most natural thing in the world.

'Shall I stop?' he whispered.

'Oh, no,' she answered. 'I want you, Gabriele. I need you tonight.'

There on the sofa, with the fire crackling and the Carnival fireworks blazing across the Grand Canal, they made the sweetest, most gentle love. Gabriele thought only of pleasing her but Jude wanted more than his tenderness. Throwing off his clothes she stared at his slender, boyish body, so different from any man's she'd ever known. Running her hands over his smooth olive skin, she smiled at the dazed pleasure in his eyes.

'You're so lovely,' she murmured as she mounted him and pressed her long lean body on to his.

'Madonna,' he sighed as her wonderful breasts brushed against his belly '*Ti voglio bene, ti voglio.*'

Jude pushed down hard as he thrust into her, rising and falling with his every move. The cold anger that had enveloped her body began to crack as she felt the love in him pulse through her. For the first time since Jonathan, she felt like a real woman again. Crying out with pleasure, she abandoned herself to the glory of his love-making. Stretching her body under his, winding her legs tightly around his thighs, she came in a rush of feelings, where joy conflicted with sorrow and the past merged into the future. They lay on the golden sofa,

clinging on to each other, weeping, unable either to speak or to let go. Finally Gabriele raised his face to hers.

'I've always loved you.'

Jude sighed and kissed his soft, golden neck.

'What stopped you before? Not David, I'm sure.'

'Jonathan,' Gabriele replied. 'You adored him, Jude.'

She nodded as a slow tear crept down her cheek and landed on his chest.

'I still do,' she whispered.

'Don't worry. I know that,' he said, stroking her hair.

'What will we do, Gabriele?'

'Carry on, what else, *cara*? We're friends, you and I,' he reminded her.

'And lovers,' she added gently.

'Lovers,' he sighed, as he kissed her soft rosy nipples to a delicate point.

Jude cuddled closer into the warmth of his chest.

'I don't want the night to end.'

'But it will, *tesora*,' he murmured, stroking her tangled golden hair from off her face. 'Then what?'

'I'll go back to Cambridge and pack up our house,' she answered quietly.

'Darling, where will you go then?'

Jude shook her head and shivered.

'I don't know. I just don't know.'

'Stay with me?' he said, nervously. 'I'll give you all the love you need. *Cara*, please, stay?' he begged.

She stared into his wide brown eyes, huge with tears, and shook her head.

'I can't do that, Gabriele. I must leave Venice.'

She did, the following afternoon, leaving a note for David to say she was selling the flat in Calle del Carbon and starting divorce proceedings as soon as she got back to England

Chapter Eighteen

Jude packed up their home on the Cambridge Backs alone. When David phoned she insisted that she didn't want him there, that she preferred to do it on her own. It was, in fact, anything but the truth. She hated the vast emptiness of the house, echoing and clattering to her every footstep. It was an agony sifting through drawers full of old letters, birthday cards, and little messages of love. When Jude found the hat she'd worn that summer's day, long ago, when the four of them had punted down the Cam to Grantchester, she put her head in her hands and abandoned herself to uncontrollable grief. They had been so golden-bright and full of promise, so in love with life and themselves, so convinced of their success. She and David had failed miserably. What had they got? A disastrous marriage and two miscarriages. Jonathan and Claudia were the successful ones, but they no longer had each other – thanks to her. Jude's star and David's had risen too high and sparkled too bright. When they couldn't go any higher they fell, leaving everything they'd touched smashed and in ruins. Breaking up almost ten years of married life left Jude feeling bereft of hope. There was nothing to grasp on to or believe in, nothing to hope for or look forward to.

She groped through the freezing cold March days in a haze of misery. Outside the driving spring rain dashed her daffodils and crocuses to pieces; inside she packed up her broken marriage. She crated everything David possessed and shipped it off to him in Venice. He would never be a brilliant academic, never realise his glittering dreams of success, but he was the father of a strong, healthy son. The sight of the

baby's room she'd lovingly decorated before Christmas broke Jude's heart. The little chest she'd bought and filled with tiny vests and bootees she firmly shut, then closed the door on the room itself. The pain was too much to bear as it was. There would be no telling what she would do if she allowed herself down that path of loss and despair. One thing Jude knew, even in her misery, was that she wanted to live. Like somebody fumbling in the dark, she knew that if she could survive this nightmare, life would start again. She didn't know where or how, simply that it would.

One afternoon, just as Jude was emptying the cellar, Lucy turned up, big and bloomingly pregnant.

'Hi, Jude,' she said, nervously. 'Am I the last person in the world you want to see?'

Jude stared at her rounded belly and the big bunch of narcissi she held in her trembling hand.

'No, Lucy. Come in.'

'I've come to help you pack,' She said, sidestepping the half filled chests in the hallway.

'Good, but let's have a cup of tea first, eh?'

Jude wanted to know every detail of Lucy's pregnancy. The scan, the ante-natal classes, the mothers she'd met at the National Childbirth meeting. Lucy talked self-consciously to start with, but then like all pregnant women, went into ecstatic descriptions of her baby's first kick, the way it was lying inside her, how many weeks gone she was, the pram she'd ordered. Suddenly she stopped.

'Are you sure you want to hear all this?' Lucy's voice trailed away.

Jude nodded.

'Yes. I want to remember my own baby, not forget it.'

'Remembering will make you sad.'

'I couldn't be any sadder if I tried.'

Every room held memories so poignant that Jude began to feel that she, David, the babies and Jonathan would always be there. As she emptied the cupboards and the wardrobes,

cleared the shelves and drawers, it wasn't David she felt beside her but Jonathan. Memories of him flooded back, wave after wave of them. Waking up to him, smiling at her as she opened her eyes and he'd whispered, 'Hi, Jude. I love you.' The day he'd covered their bed with fragrant lilies then pushed her naked on to the flowers and made love to her. She could hear echoes of his laughter, see his smile, feel him on the stairs, frenziedly kissing her as he carried her up to bed. The worst memory was the last one, his face at the door as he turned and walked away. The agony of the months that followed, and the effort of trying to make it work with David, trying to have his child, trying to love him all over again. Why had he put her through it, why had she submitted to his demands? With searing clarity Jude saw, yet again, how madly mistaken she'd been and wondered what her life would have been if she'd left Cambridge that day with Jonathan.

When Claudia turned up on the doorstep, one blustery cold Friday evening, Jude could hardly believe her eyes.

'Cop this,' Claudia said, shoving a bottle of champagne through the door. 'And these.' She thrust an enormous armful of sweet-smelling freesias into Jude's arms. 'I've come to help you do what I've been telling you to do for years – get the fuck out of this town!'

'You're turning into my fairy godmother,' Jude said as she hugged her.

'Somebody's got to look after you. You're a walking disaster zone.' Jude burst out laughing. Only Claude could say something as painfully true as that and make it sound funny. 'I'm not leaving this house until you're packed up and ready to move. Right?'

'Right,' she reiterated.

'Excellent. Now let's crack open the Bollinger and get started.'

They didn't in fact do a thing that night, just talked and talked and talked.

'What I don't understand, and keep asking myself over and

over again, is *why* David hung on with me?' Jude asked. 'I mean, he'd got Beata who adored him. We could have parted friends, him to Venice, me to Jonathan. Simple.'

'It would have made a lot of sense,' Claudia agreed. 'Unfortunately life's not like that. He must still have loved you, and I suspect he always will. Plus he was seriously locked into King's and dreams of being a brilliant academic. How could he leave when the two things he most desired were right here in Cambridge?'

'I suppose so,' Jude reluctantly agreed. 'But in retrospect it was like shooting himself in the foot. OK, he came back to Cambridge, but nothing ever went right afterwards, for me or him. It was as if he had to prove himself a good husband but couldn't hack it. The heart had gone out of him, Claude. He was here in body but never in mind or spirit.'

'OK, we've done David to death,' Claudia said briskly. 'What about *you*? Why did you bottle out of the best relationship of your life? And don't give me that shit that it was to do with me,' she added, sharply.

'I've been torturing myself with that same question since I got back from Venice,' Jude admitted. 'Why? I had it all with Jonathan – wealth, success, beauty, love. And the sex was out of this world.'

'Oh, tell me about it!' Claudia said, taking a long pull on her wine.

'I suppose it's poetic justice that neither of us have the pleasure any more,' Jude said as they both started to giggle uncontrollably.

'So *why*? You still haven't answered the question,' Claudia demanded, determined not to be distracted by memories by Jonathan's sexual prowess.

'I loved David.'

'Come on, Jude. Get real.'

'I was indebted to him.'

'For what. Fucking you?'

'OK,' she said with a resigned smile. 'I had a disastrous

love affair, years ago. I lost all belief in myself and then I met David and he restored me.'

Claudia shook her head.

'I don't buy it. You repaid whatever debt you owed him a hundred times over. There's got to be more to it than that.'

'Safe sex,' Jude finally admitted. 'I'd fallen once for a complete bastard, I wasn't going to do it again.'

'Oh?' said Claudia, warming to a juicy story. 'Tell me what the bastard did to you.'

'Dumped me three hours after he'd made love to me in Leeds then left for his godfather's vineyards in California.'

As Jude related the story Claudia's eyes grew wider and wider. Suddenly she sprang from the sofa and grabbed Jude's arm.

'You don't mean Lucius Carmichael?'

Jude nodded.

'The very one. It's funny, I always thought you'd know him, that's why I never mentioned him before.'

'Do I know the bastard?' Claudia exclaimed. 'My mother's his godmother.'

'Lucky her! I've already met the godfather at Lucius's twenty first. Why weren't you there?'

'I refused,' Claudia answered forcefully. 'Jude, you've got to know that Lucius is everything I loathe and detest in the male species. He makes David look like St Francis of Assisi.'

'Yeah – and I adored him,' she replied.

'Sucker! So what happened?'

'I told you. He walked out and never came back.'

'And you were devastated?' Claudia asked.

'Completely.'

'Believe me, Jude, Lucius did you a big favour. He's been screwing around since he was fourteeen. He's good at it, I'm told.'

'Very,' Jude agreed, with a smile. 'So what do you know about him?'

'He slept around with every kind of crazy woman and

became a heroin addict. He finally got himself cleaned up a few years ago and now runs the biggest wine-producing vineyards in Sonoma County, California.'

'I saw him across the street in Padua,' Jude admitted. 'I tried to run after him.'

'That's a habit you've got to stop,' Claudia teased as she poured more champagne into their glasses. 'So, we've done David and Lucius Carmichael. Back to you and safe sex.'

Jude cast her mind back over the years.

'David was tender and loving. Patient too. We had fun together in bed, but it was never like being with Lucius. The truth is, Claude, I didn't want it to be like that. I wanted to be safe and secure in my relationship, not taken to the mountain tops one minute, then dashed back down to earth and discarded the next.'

Claudia smiled impishly.

'Sounds like the story of my life.'

'Not mine,' Jude answered. 'I wasn't looking to get hurt any more.'

'David must have seemed like a knight in shining armour. Completely reliable, honest, and he adored you. The perfect antidote to rejection. So, where does Jonathan fit in?'

'Jonathan was altogether different.'

'What a relief! I thought you were going to say he reminded you of Lucius.'

'Claude, how could you?'

'Well, they're both sexy.'

'With a difference. One uses sex to get what he wants, the other gives everything he's got. It was wonderful beyond words, loving Jonathan, but ...'

'You couldn't leave David,' Claudia crisply finished the sentence for her. 'Now we've come full-circle and I've still not had any answers about your literary future.'

Jude snorted.

'I haven't a literary thought in my head.'

'Then you'd better get one. *The Voices of Angels* looks all set to be a huge bestseller.'

Jude pulled down the corners of her mouth, determined to be as gloomy as possible.

'It would make a wonderful television series,' Claudia added.

'Great! The last thing I need right now is a return trip to Venice.'

'You should move to London. New friends, new places, new interests, lots to do.' Claudia suddenly stopped and smiled. 'You should move into my flat while I'm away.' Jude stared at her thoughtfully. 'London would be great for you,' Claudia insisted.

'You know, that's not a bad idea, Claude.'

'Let's pack up this dead Cambridge life and leave for London together,' Claudia urged with characteristic impetuousity.

'I can't do that now,' Jude answered. 'I'm going North for a few days.'

'Oh, no. You're going to top yourself on Haworth Moor?'

Jude laughed.

'I'm going to stay with Nell and her three noisy stepsons. There won't be a moment for any sort of self-indulgence in that house.'

'Then you'll come to London later?'

Jude nodded. 'I think so.'

'You won't change your mind, will you?'

'No,' she promised, but she did two days later.

Claudia left on Sunday night, having achieved what she'd set out to do. Pack up Jude and all her belongings. The removal men were due on Monday morning, to take everything into storage until Jude found her own place again. After Claudia had driven away Jude put all that she needed into the back of her car then went to bed and tried to read a book. The bedroom was cold and empty, even the memories had gone. When the phone rang she quickly picked it up, grateful for any

kind of diversion. Thinking it was Claudia, checking her out, she answered, 'Hi, Claude. How was the journey back?'

The man's voice on the other end surprised her and for several seconds she wasn't able to place it.

'Hello, Jude. It's Lucius Carmichael.'

Easing herself on to the edge of her bed, she steadied her breathing and answered.

'Lucius.' Surprised and rather pleased by the confident ring in her voice she added, 'How are you?'

'Fine, Jude,' he answered. He said her name in exactly the same way she remembered, as if it were the only name dear to him. Involuntarily, her heartbeat quickened. 'Not quite as famous as you these days,' he added warmly. 'I'm a great fan of yours, Ms Summers, especially *Voices of Angels* which I've just this minute finished. It's quite stunning, you know.'

Torn between his flattery and wondering how on earth he'd tracked her down, Jude was slightly at a loss for words. Characteristically, he wasn't.

'I'm in England for a few weeks and I wondered if I might come and see you?'

'See me?' she echoed, wondering in exactly what capacity they'd meet. Old friends, ex-lovers, fan meets writer – what?

'Yes. I could drive down and see you before I leave for the States.'

Panic gripped Jude. He absolutely mustn't come here, she thought. He had no place in her Cambridge past.

'No, not here,' she answered sharply.

'OK. Where?'

'I'll be in Leeds all week. Staying with an old college friend.'

'Great. I'll pick you up,' he suggested.

'No.' She heard herself again refusing him with unnecessary forcefulness. 'I'll drive over to Abbey Park.' She didn't add she'd prefer to have her own transport, just in case he walked out on her again.

'Excellent. Come for lunch on Wednesday?'

'Yes, lunch would be fine.' No candlelight or romantic scenarios, just a meal in the bright, uncompromising light of day.

'I look forward to it, Jude,' he said softly. 'Good night.'

She put down the phone and lay back on her pillows, staring up at the ceiling. Abbey Park. The very name brought the memories flooding back and burst the bank she'd carefully constructed over the years. The dress he'd sent her, that she'd never thrown out, now lay at the bottom of one of the packing cases in the echoing hallway. The intense fragrance of hot-house lilies that mid-winter night. Dancing in the Jacobean ballroom, knowing he would come and claim her, and when he did, the ecstasy of their love-making. He had answered all her desires, fulfilled her dreams, drenched her in exquisite pleasure, then dumped her. Why had she agreed to see him? she asked herself, and immediately knew the answer. She was still chasing the tail-end of a dream, and even after ten years, she needed some answers.

Jude left Cambridge the following day and the rain that had accompanied her and David as they drove south together seven years ago now blustered around her as she headed back north. It was a steel-grey relentless rain and completely suited Jude's mood. Slashing against the windscreen, it demanded all her attention, leaving not a moment for reflection, either on her past or the future. As she drove through Doncaster and Wakefield into Leeds her heart lifted. She loved these terraced, red-brick northern towns. They were raw and tough, poor and neglected, but they survived, with a fierce, proud identity that no modernising county council could erase. Their damp harshness eased Jude's sadness like no other place. Venice would have broken her heart with its tragic beauty, Cambridge was an agony of memories, London she simply couldn't cope with right now, but Leeds was just right.

'Welcome to the madhouse,' said Nell, pulling Jude into the hallway that was soon chock-a-block with noisy boys and barking dogs. 'I'll switch on the telly then we'll have a bit of peace, if we're lucky.'

Over tea Nell said, 'Jude, I've got something to ask you.' She paused to gaze down at her enormous pregnant belly. 'It's about the girls,' she said, tenderly tapping her front. 'I've had the scan. It's girls, thank God. Jack and I wondered if you'd be godmother to them?' Tears filled Jude's eyes and Nell quickly added, 'Say no if it's too much. I'd completely understand.'

Jude shook her head.

'I'm delighted and greatly honoured,' she said, reaching out for Nell's hand and squeezing it. 'It'll take me years not to cry at the mention of babies.'

'When it comes to babies, even painful memories are good,' Nell said wisely.

'I'll be a good godmother to both of them,' Jude promised. 'I'll remember their birthdays and try not to spoil them too much.'

The two women spent the afternoon chatting and laughing in between playing with the boys and later getting them bathed and into bed. They all insisted Jude had to tell them a bedtime story, then sing lullabies until they went to sleep. At last the boys tumbled into a reluctant sleep and Jude sat in their shambolic bedroom, lit only by a bedside lamp in the shape of a globe, and gazed at them. Their faces were flushed and soft as they slept, arms flung out from under the duvets, legs spread-eagled across their beds, hair tousled. Toys lay scattered around them, apart from their special cuddlies which they hugged to their chests. It was a scene of utter peace, until first light woke them and another day roared into action. Jude went downstairs, yawning her head off.

'Hi there,' Jack called as she walked into the sitting room. 'How're you doing?'

'Knackered,' Jude sighed as she slumped into the sofa beside Nell. 'Those kids of yours are dynamite.'

'Here, this should set you up,' he said, handing her a gin and tonic. 'Now, you ladies, stay right where you are while I go and fix dinner.' He headed out of the room but stopped at the door and said, 'Aren't I just the perfect man?'

'He really is,' Nell said as he closed the door. 'I should know,' she added ruefully. She'd been married for five years to an alcoholic who'd beaten her up regularly, before he'd run off with every penny from their joint bank account. 'Now, Jude, where were we?' she said, savouring every minute of their time together. They talked till late that night and all the next day, in between taking the boys to school, playgroup and swimming lessons. It was only late on Tuesday night that Jude finally spilled the beans.

'I'm going to see Lucius tomorrow,' she said as airily as she could manage.

'With a machete, I hope,' Nell asked, deadly serious.

'No, for lunch. He invited me,' she added defensively. 'The years have rolled by, you know.'

Nell shrugged.

'Are you trying to tell me maturity has transformed the bastard?'

'No, but curiosity has got the better of me.'

Jude dressed with immense care. She was less voluptuous than she had been in her early-twenties, but it suited the strong lines of her face and gave a new elegance to her body. She chose a short black velvet skirt; a soft sky-blue chenille sweater that made her grey eyes clear and silvery bright; silky black tights and black suede boots with a heel and fake Victorian tie fastenings. Her hair was long and loose, and she applied the barest touch of make-up, just enough to add warmth to her lips and cheeks.

'You look drop-dead gorgeous,' Nell exclaimed when she walked into the kitchen. 'He'll fuck you, Jude,' she warned.

'He should be so lucky.'

For all her confidence Jude was in fact terribly nervous.

As she drove out of Leeds her heart started pounding. She was momentarily confused when she reached the outskirts of the city, changed and expanded into a modern clutter of new estates and industrial zones. Once she hit the high moors she was relieved to see the land remained the same. Untouched, savagely beautiful, it rolled away from the grey valley where Leeds sprawled, and climbed up to the towering Pennines, characteristically obscured in low cloud.

As Jude's car rumbled over the cattle grids that led into Abbey Park, she vividly recalled the last time she'd passed along this winding drive, now hedged with scarlet rhododendron. She'd sat in the back of the chauffeur-driven car that Lucius had sent for her, hardly able to breathe with excitement. The memory of that girl suddenly steadied Jude's nerves. She'd come a long way and travelled far in those intervening years. She was a mature woman now, with success in her wake and years of experience behind her. She wasn't going to be fazed by a multi-millionaire vineyard owner from California.

Suddenly the car burst out of the long, dark drive, into the sweeping, elegant courtyard of the Jacobean stately home. Lucius was on the marble steps, waiting for her.

Jude held out her hand to him, pre-empting the kiss he would have preferred.

'You look wonderful,' he murmured in the caressing voice she remembered from so long ago.

'You too, Lucius.'

What she hadn't been able to see, from across the square in Padova, was how the years had marked him. His body was strong and lean but his face looked distinctly older than his thirty years. His dark hair was still as silky and luxuriant, but now touched with grey at the temples, and his eyes were the same dark seductive blue. Deep lines around his mouth suggested Lucius had suffered but the look suited him, making him somehow even more attractive than the saturnine beauty of his youth. Jude glanced from Lucius to the house, with its leaded windows twinkling in a burst of bright spring sunshine.

'The last time I was at Abbey Park it was full of people and loud with music.'

'I remember,' he said, staring her steadily in the eye. 'We've not had many parties like that since. My parents both died quite recently, you know?'

'Yes, I heard. I'm sorry, they were good people.'

'God knows how they produced the likes of me. I must've been the biggest disappointment of their lives. Still, my sister's a good egg and she's married a county sort so they'll do nicely here. I'd fuck it up in no time.'

Jude laughed at his bleak honesty.

'There's some lunch inside,' he said, taking her hand and leading her into the long, galleried hall, still hung with magnificent family portraits, framed in old gold. 'Then I thought perhaps we could go for a walk.'

Jude nodded.

'Yes, I'd like that.'

Sitting in the dining room overlooking the rose garden brought back vivid memories of Lord and Lady Stokes.

'Did your parents like California?' she asked as they started their first course, wild mushrooms in a creamy sauce, wrapped in filo pastry. Jude turned down the Chardonnay the butler offered, preferring to stick to water as Lucius did.

'They'd occasionally make a duty visit to their black sheep son, but the heat and I always combined to make an unforgettably disastrous stay.' Jude couldn't help but laugh at his grim description. 'I was usually out of my head, or in bed with some woman who was guaranteed to upset them. Poor buggers,' he said. 'I seriously went in for rubbing their noses in the shit. They adored you, by the way.'

Jude smiled with real pleasure.

'That's a compliment. I thought your father was brilliant.'

'Well, the feeling was mutual.' Lucius had often thought, in the wisdom of his older years, that he'd dumped Jude so mercilessly in order to shock his parents. When he'd taken up with his godfather's PA, right under their very noses, not

eighteen hours after openly courting Jude on the evening of his twenty-first party, they had been mortified – and he'd enjoyed seeing the bitter disappointment in their faces.

'Won't you miss any of this?' she asked, glancing around the oak panelled dining room.

'You, of all people, will hardly believe me when I tell you that the only thing I'll miss is the library. Since I've stopped abusing my body I've started feeding my mind and discovered a real pleasure in literature.' He paused to refill his glass with sparkling mineral water. 'I overdosed on heroin a couple of years back – always one for excess, as you know. The LA Drug Rehab Centre put me through the twelve-step self-discovery programme, after which I came out a changed and wiser man. That's when I took to literature and writing in a big way, and ironically that's how I found you again.' He stopped talking to smile at her across the table. 'I bought your first book, *Secrets*, in the airport departure lounge in Bangkok.' What he omitted to tell her was that the first thing he did, as soon as his feet hit the ground in LA, was to hire a private detective to find out everything there was to know on Jude Summers. 'I read it twice. It's brilliant, Jude, and so bloody funny.'

She blushed with pleasure.

'Did you see the television series?'

'No, not in the States, but I bought the BBC videos and watched them in LA. Good director that Jonathan Raphael.'

He watched curiously, wondering how she'd react to the mention of her ex-lover. She didn't but neatly turned the conversation to Venice and her research for *The Voices of Angels*. After a delicious lemon meringue pie, they drank their coffee in the drawing room, in front of a crackling fire.

'I can't remember when I last ate such an enormous lunch,' she said as she curled up in the corner of the sofa.

'You certainly need it,' Lucius replied. 'You seem to be much thinner than I remember.'

'I have lost a bit of weight recently,' she answered guardedly. 'Now how about that walk you promised?'

Lucius found Jude some wellies and an old Barbour and they set off across the formal lawns surrounding the hall, then headed towards an avenue of limes that gave on to a wood loud with birdsong. Spring was everywhere. In the half-open, tender green of the lime leaves, in the profusion of daffodils, occasionally gilded by the bright sunshine. In the perfumed air and moody sky that switched erratically from stormy to piercing blue. As they left the shelter of the wood they struck out across the open moorland that edged the Pennine ridge. It was hard going on the peaty earth, which was soggy and heavy underfoot after a long wet winter. They talked occasionally, but not like they had over lunch, polite chatter, interspersed with light laughter. This was talking for talking's sake, with a stop for breath in between sentences. Lucius asked question after question about Venice and *The Voices of Angels*.

'Come on, Lucius,' she gasped eventually. 'Your turn. Tell me about California?'

'It's OK. I'm thinking of expanding the business to Italy. There're some excellent vineyards coming up for sale in the Veneto. I was there not long ago, on a business trip to Padua.'

Jude had been wondering all morning if she'd admit to seeing him in Italy. When it came to it she simply said, 'I saw you.'

Lucius stopped dead in his tracks and gaped at her.

'Saw *me*? Where?'

'In Padua, outside a bar. You were talking to a man who looked keen to make a deal.'

'Piazza della Frutta,' he cried. 'You saw me and never even stopped to say hello?'

'Hey, Lucius. The last time we met you couldn't get away fast enough,' she reminded him. 'Anyway, I was doing a television interview. By the time I'd finished you were gone,' she lied.

As they climbed on to the high moor they stopped talking and concentrated on negotiating the sheep tracks around the

rocky boulders and bubbling streams. Lucius scaled a pile of boulders and held out his hand.

'Jump,' he said, pulling her up beside him. 'Here's a view to take your breath away.'

Jude balanced on the narrow ledge of slippery rock and stared out across the sweep of Abbey Park, an ordered, fertile space in wild, rolling moorland. Way down in the valley, far, far below, lay Leeds, a vast industrial sprawl spiked with redundant mill chimneys, lined on all sides with red-brick terraced houses, row upon row of them.

'Let's keep moving,' Lucius said, setting a brisk pace. 'Or we'll get caught in the storm.'

They couldn't outrun the storm, which like all moorland downfalls was out to get them. The heavens opened and they were drenched in minutes. With the rain slanting in their faces it was impossible to go forwards so they huddled under a craggy outcrop and waited for it to blow over. As Jude hunched deeper into her Barbour she recalled her first meeting with David on Haworth Moor. It had been even wilder that day when David had appeared from nowhere, a small scurrying figure on the edge of Wuthering Heights. It was strange to be up on the same moors now with Lucius, the man she'd been running away from when she'd bumped into David, so long ago.

They walked for hours, through rain and blustering sunshine, returning to Abbey Park after six, wet, tired and very cold.

'How about a swim?' Lucius said, as they dumped their sodden Barbours in the hall.

'You're not suggesting we retrace our footsteps and dip into an icy-cold tarn?' she asked weakly.

'No, there's a heated swimming pool just behind the conservatory. Don't worry, there are about twenty swimming costumes over there, all different sizes, and all extremely ugly.'

The pool was an oasis on the Yorkshire moor. Rippling

blue, luxuriously warm and deep, with a sauna and jacuzzi. As they swam the wind whistled around the building and rain pattered on the glass roof but inside all was peace and gentle, shimmering light. Jude, looking very odd in an old elasticated swimsuit, lay in the hot water and floated on her back, completely relaxed. Seeing Lucius ploughing up and down, twenty lengths of the crawl ahead of her, induced her to do ten lengths of vigorous back stroke, then it was into the sauna where she would have fallen asleep if she hadn't been in dire dread of scorching her nostrils.

After they'd showered and dressed, in discreetly separate changing rooms, Lucius announced he was off to the library for a read and a snooze in front of the fire

'See you for dinner,' he said as they parted ways.

Jude wondered how long he thought she was staying. He'd said, 'Come for lunch,' and now it was dinner. She hadn't even got a change of clothes. Suddenly she remembered her car was stuffed full of her belongings She slipped out into the wet night and groped around the suitcases in the boot. Finally she tracked down a rather elegant grey silk dress and her jewellery purse. Feeling pleased that she'd look glamorous for supper, she went to her room and sank on to the bed, her muscles loose and relaxed after the long walk on the moors followed by the session in the sauna. Jude closed her eyes and sighed. Why couldn't Lucius have been this nice ten years ago? she thought. He was soft, gentle, sexy, charming and thoughtful. Quite the opposite to the raunchy, ruthless Hooray Henry who'd worked so hard at getting up everybody's nose.

Suddenly the phone beside her bed shrilled out. Jude jumped up and nervously looked about the room Surely it couldn't be for her? Picking it up she said, 'Hello. Jude Summers speaking.'

'It's Nell.'

'Nell, you gave me a fright.'

'Jude, has he raped you? Why aren't you back?'

She burst out laughing.

'I'm in the lap of luxury, Nell, and too damned tired to move,' she confessed.

'So, you're OK?' Nell asked, in a voice that doubted she could be.

'Fine. He's changed.'

Nell sniffed.

'Watch your back, Jude. He's still a bastard.'

'You're probably right,' she agreed. 'But can I stay the night, Mum?'

'Sure, as long as you don't fuck him.'

They had dinner in the dining room, lit with silver candelabra and a glowing log fire. Jude was ravenous and devoured everything that was put in front of her – asparagus soup, shrimps in garlic sauce, roast lamb, and sherry trifle. The wines were delicious too and the mood between them grew warmer and easier with every passing course. Lucius wanted to know all about her life in Cambridge. He listened entranced as Jude talked her way through the first and second courses, then suddenly stopped.

'I'm dominating the conversation,' she said. 'Come on, you must tell me more about your life in California.'

'Well,' he started reluctantly, 'I live in Sonoma County which is big with fabulous rolling hills. The land is rich and fertile, perfect for the white grapes we produce, and the climate is wonderful, not too hot and never cold.'

'It sounds like Eden,' Jude enthused.

'That's what I thought when my godfather handed it over to me.'

'Do you work with him?'

'No. Jacob retired almost the day I arrived in America. He's got all the free time he needs for doing what he likes best – screwing around.'

'Wasn't that your forte too?' she asked mischievously.

'Still is, I hope.' He waited for the butler to leave the room then added, 'I really did you wrong, didn't I, Jude?'

'Yes, but it was a long time ago.'

'I remember every detail of that night,' he said, gazing across the table at her. 'I've dreamt of it for years, you know.' Jude blinked in disbelief. Him dreaming of *her* really was a turn up. 'You looked like a goddess in that dress I sent.'

'Oh, I felt like a goddess.'

'All night I had you in my line of vision. As people came and went, talking and clapping me on the back, I knew you were mine.' Jude's body tingled with pleasure as he awoke the memory of that glorious evening. 'Then we made love, in the dawn light, and you were wild, Jude. Wonderful.' He paused, his eyes never moving from her face. 'And I left you on the bed, naked, with your hair tumbled about your face like a child's.'

Jude didn't say anything. Years ago she'd tracked him down and found out the painful truth of his betrayal. There was no unsolved mystery in her life and the hurt had long since gone. She was astonished to discover Lucius had been haunted by the guilty memory.

'I went for the wrong woman,' he admitted. 'And you married an academic. That was a safe bet.'

She couldn't stop herself from laughing at the inaccuracy of his statement.

'Not quite,' she answered evenly. 'He left me for another woman.'

His heart lifted. He knew every piece of her past but wanted to hear it from her own lips. He paused to pour more wine into her glass. 'Was it a good marriage, Jude?'

'Yes, for a while. We were a golden couple, riding a big wave with "Success" written right the way across it. We had our own separate careers, a dazzling social life, a wonderful home on the Cambridge Backs – and we loved each other. What could possibly go wrong?'

'Every fucking thing,' he answered, like the man of bitter

experience he was. 'I read about your rather public affair with the director, Jonathan Raphael.' He hadn't. Everything he knew about Jude was via the private detective.

'Yes,' she said. 'What you wouldn't have read about was my husband's completely un-public affair with a colleague in Venice.'

He shook his head sympathetically, he knew every detail of that too. Sensing an uneasy shift of mood, Lucius suggested they move into the library for coffee and brandy. In front of a roaring fire, Jude sipped her cognac and said, 'So, Lucius, why now?'

'My life's been empty for a long time, Jude. I've spent years running away from this place. Most of my friends dumped me, or I'd dumped them, and then my parents died. It seemed right that when I came home this final time I should contact you.'

If he'd told her the truth, that she'd become everything he desired, an ideal he'd dreamed of for years and that he wanted to marry her, he knew she would have been out of the house in seconds. For the moment he opted for a small part of the truth.

'Your timing's perfect,' she said, not realising that was exactly how he'd planned it to be.

They didn't sleep together that night, but carefully avoided it. They spent another day together, talking and walking on the moors, then made love that night, when not to would have been ridiculous. Jude was frightened and edgy to start with, oddly enough not because of Lucius but the other men in her life: Gabriele, David and Jonathan. It was only when Lucius's mouth covered hers and his tongue reached into her that she remembered *him*. His hands flickered down her body then stroked her long smooth thighs and the soft curve of her hips. Sudden, unexpected desire flared in Jude and she opened her legs for his sensitive fingers as she stretched underneath him.

'Ahh . . .' he murmured as he found the warm inside of

her. This was not the boy who had made love to her with skill and expertise; this was the man, grown older and wiser. The dash and flourish of his former love-making were gone, replaced with tenderness and a great need. Jude wrapped herself around him and pulled him on to her, hungry for the taste and smell of him.

'Oh, my darling,' he whispered into her hair. 'I've longed for you.' The yearning in him took her breath away and she opened up to him, giving herself completely. When he entered, tight, firm and urgent, Jude crushed her hands into his back and arched her spine to his thrust. Dazed with pleasure, Lucius smiled down at her then buried his face in her flaming hair.

'Jude, I love you. I love you,' he sighed as he pushed deeper into her open body. They moved together, slow, insistent, remembering. Suddenly he shuddered and gave a cry.

'Oh, Jude,' he whispered as he fell exhausted on to her breasts. 'I'm sorry, it was too quick.' His fingers caressed her clitoris and he moved down her belly to lick her, but Jude stopped him.

'Let me hold you,' she whispered.

He lay against her while she stroked his hair, his neck and his shoulders. His breathing became light and gentle, his body soft and relaxed. When he rolled away from her, in a deep sleep, she stared into his open face. Nell was wrong, he *had* changed. He was softer, gentler and full of regrets, and she could have loved him except it was all too late for her.

This time Jude left Lucius. Taking her few possessions she crept out of the house and, in the half light before dawn, drove back to Leeds and on to the motorway. There she indicated right, to go south to London, but suddenly stopped. Lost and confused, with tears streaming down her face, Jude circled the huge roundabout three times then indicated left. She would go north. Home, to Watendlath.

Chapter Nineteen

She arrived at the farm, thin and as white as a ghost. Sparing herself nothing Jude told her family her life was in ruins. Her brother Dan's first reaction was to thump the living daylights out of David.

'The bastard!' he exclaimed, his face livid with anger.

'I've been unfaithful too,' Jude reminded him.

Her parents shook their heads in disbelief. The life she'd lived in the South of England and in Italy was as clear to them as the dark side of the moon. But what they couldn't match in world travel and sophistication they gave in love and unquestioning loyalty.

'It's right you came home, lass,' her dad said, putting his arm protectively about his daughter's shoulders. 'We might not be fancy but we love you and we'll look after you.'

Jude laid her face against his chest and smelt the familiar, comforting smell she always associated with her father: sheep, pipe tobacco and fresh air.

'Thanks, Dad,' she murmured. 'It's good to be home.'

It was as easy as breathing, falling back into the working life of a fell farm. A wet spring gave way to a steaming hot summer. The sodden land began to dry out, and the wild, rugged landscape basked in sunshine, day after day. On the tops, where fell walkers usually walked clad against the weather in bright cagooles and waterproof leggings, they now lay sunbathing or skinny-dipped in the high tarns above Sty Head. As the temperature soared the river levels dropped and the teeming waterfalls were reduced to a soft gurgle. The sun tanned Jude's lean body and bleached her long hair to a

paler, delicate gold. Wearing cut down jeans for shorts, a T shirt and fell boots, she looked more like a girl of sixteen than the elegant Jude Summers of her London and Cambridge days. Watendlath brought strength and happiness back and Jude blossomed on the high Cumberland hills, working daily alongside Dan on the sheep farm.

Her brother was a great reader and they talked a lot of his favourite writers as they walked the fells, collecting the sheep in for shearing.

'You should have gone to university,' she said one day.

Dan shrugged.

'And what would Dad have done?' he asked. 'Sold up to the National Trust?'

It made Jude guilty to think how she'd gone her own carefree way, making decisions without even considering her family. Dan had foregone further education and the giddy pleasures of city life. He'd taken on the burden of running the farm. But for all that he was a happy man, popular and respected by all the families in the valley. He lived a life that was balanced in all its parts. Jude envied him his lack of complications. His life may not have been whacky or exciting but it was honest, rewarding and contented.

Jude got in touch with both Nell and Claudia, and apologised for walking out on them. Nell immediately understood and was only too glad that Jude was at home in Cumbria and not in Sonoma County with Lucius Carmichael. Claudia reacted quite differently.

'Christ!' she gasped when Jude phoned to say where she was. 'It sounds like *Far From the Madding Crowd*. No fucking?'

'Absolutely no fucking,' Jude answered happily. 'I strongly recommend celibacy. It clears the mind of all complications.'

'Huh, tell me about it,' Claudia answered, totally unconvinced. 'I just can't wait to get wrapped around my American lover. Can I come and see you before I leave for the States?'

She came at the end of August, bang in the middle of sheep shearing.

'I don't believe it,' she cried as she walked across the farm yard and found Jude, shearing in the byre. 'Whatever happened to the glamorous media woman?'

'Gone forever,' Jude answered, as she deftly trimmed the last bit of fleece from off the struggling sheep's back and released it, naked and bleating, to join the rest of the shorn flock in the fold. 'This is my brother Dan,' she added.

'Pleased to meet you, Claudia,' he said, shaking her hand then handing her the clippers. 'Fancy helping out?'

Claudia laughed, stunned by Dan's amazingly good looks and strong, sexy body.

'You never told me you had Adonis for a brother,' she whispered, as she followed Jude across the yard, into the farmhouse for tea. 'He looks like a modern version of Coleridge.'

'I thought you were spoken for?' Jude teased.

'I am in New York,' Claudia answered. 'Up here, I'm anybody's.'

She didn't in fact, have time to wreak emotional havoc on the Watendlath fells. Jude had booked two days off and took her walking, first in the gentle Buttermere valley where they stayed overnight at the Fish Hotel, then over into wild Wastwater valley the next day and a night at the Wasdale Head Hotel, overlooking the grey screes and desolate lake. On the top of Scafell Pike, with the whole of England falling away at their feet, the two friends lay side by side on a flat boulder and ate cheese and pickle sandwiches and hard boiled eggs.

'No wonder Wordsworth was crazy about this land,' Claudia sighed as she looked down on Lingmell Fell and Great End. 'These mountains move even me to tears.'

'I know,' Jude answered, staring up at a sky so blue and unencumbered she felt she could take off and fly away. 'It's my country, Claude, and I'd forgotten it. Since I've been back

I've never known such peace. I don't think I'll ever be able to leave it again.'

Claudia looked sceptical.

'Are you telling me you'll live up here like a nun and shear sheep?'

Jude laughed.

'Probably,' she answered happily.

'Well, I don't buy it for a minute,' Claudia retorted. 'You have to write again, Jude. Where will you get your inspiration from?'

'I've already got it,' she answered with a mysterious smile.

'You dark horse!' Claudia cried. 'Tell me.'

'I visited Lucius at Abbey Park, and slept with him,' she added.

'You *what*?' Claudia exclaimed.

'If you lean over any further you might just fall off the highest peak in England,' Jude warned, laughing at Claudia's scandalised expression.

'Sucker! After everything I told you about him – *and* the way he dumped you years ago.'

Jude ignored her scolding and continued. 'I stayed with him for two days and slept with him on the last night.'

'Was it good?'

She shook her head.

'No, it was sad,' she admitted. 'I sneaked out while he was sleeping. But something happened that night, Claude.' Jude stared out towards Wastwater, turning crimson as the sun began its descent into the west. 'It's hard to explain, but for years after him I felt awkward about sex.'

'Ah-ha. Back to safe sex,' Claudia said gleefully.

'It didn't help being around the likes of you and Jonathan. You two would have done it in broad daylight, upside down from a chandelier.'

'We were a bit like two dogs on heat,' Claudia admitted with characteristic frankness.

'I could never reconstruct that passion, not until Jonathan, and even then I always had this nagging doubt at the back of my mind that I was no good at it anyway. Making love with Lucius again was like laying a ghost.'

Claudia smiled.

'Hey, what's it like fucking a ghost?'

The sun sinking low and blazing on the mountain tops made Jude spring to her feet.

'Better get a move on,' she said, shouldering her backpack. 'Or we'll be up here all night.'

'Can't think of anything nicer,' Claudia said, as she reluctantly turned her back on Scafell Pike.

As they hurried down Sty Head Pass a new moon rose over Great Gable and laced its tip with a string of pale stars. By the time they'd dropped down into Seathwaite village there were myriad stars lighting their path along the valley to Rosthwaite. They arrived, breathless and starving hungry, at the Scafell Hotel, just in time to order a delicious three-course supper. As they sat in the cosy dining room, sipping port and polishing off crumbly Stilton and Bath Oliver biscuits, Claudia reminded Jude of their unfinished conversation up on Scafell Pike.

'You've still not told me what the next book's about.'

'It's called *Rich Man*,' Jude started.

'Oh, Christ, it's about Lucius Carmichael,' Claudia groaned.

'No, that would be too cruel,' Jude said. 'But it is about wealth and destruction.'

'A touch of the Joseph Conrads.'

'I'm setting it here and in America.'

'Great. Now you'll have no excuse not to visit me in New York.'

They walked home to Watendlath, over the moonlit Borrowdale fells that Jude knew like the back of her hand. It was only on this, their last walk, that Claudia told Jude about Jonathan.

'He got married, you know?'

Jude shook her head. 'I didn't.'

'I can't see that it'll last. The girl's got nothing between her ears, but a lot between her legs.' Claudia stopped and corrected herself. 'On that basis alone it could last a lifetime. He's lined up as my first guest when I open the new series for NBC.'

'Give him my love,' Jude said quietly, glad of the velvet darkness that hid her tears.

As autumn set in the weather turned wet and windy. It was hard work, struggling up the fells, through driving wind and sleet. It was even harder herding the sheep down to the lower pastures, where the streams were spilling their banks and flooding their grazing meadows. After tupping the ewes were all returned to the fells until the weather turned really cold, then they'd be brought down again.

'It never ends,' Jude said as she collapsed in front of her mum's Aga, frozen to the marrow, with another trip up Watendlath fell facing her before nightfall.

'That's sheep-farming for you,' her dad said, cheerfully puffing on his pipe.

'Yes, but why now, when I've got so much to do,' Jude grumbled. Apart from the synopsis for *Rich Man* which she was trying to complete, Jude had bought a dilapidated cottage from a neighbouring farmer and was in the process of having it rebuilt. She'd loved being back at home, in the bosom of her family, but now she was strong and writing again, she needed her own place. Not for a minute did she think of leaving the valley, this was where she belonged. As Jude watched the builders working on her cottage overlooking Watendlath tarn, she could hardly wait to move in.

'It's not that I haven't enjoyed living here, Mum,' she explained, apologetically. 'It's just that I need to be on my own now.'

'Of course you do, love, and I'm glad of it too,' her mother said with a warm smile. 'I shall miss you, even though you're

only straight across the valley. It's been nice having another woman about the house.'

Jude hugged her mother, to whom she'd grown very close over the last few months.

'I'll wave to you every morning, just as soon as I wake up,' she promised.

In the same week that she posted off the new synopsis to Rose at Hibbs, Jude moved into Tarn Cottage, and set about furnishing and decorating it through mail order catalogues. She'd had a large balcony built upstairs and a conservatory downstairs, so she could open her doors in the fine weather to the garden and the lake. It was vital that the cottage should be snug and cosy through the long, hard winters, when the whole valley was often snowed up for weeks on end. It was equally important that in the summer months Jude could throw open the doors and windows and live virtually outside, in the light and beauty of the high fells.

Her first visitor was Rose Traverse.

'Dear God, Jude,' she said as she stepped out of the car, right into a pile of sheep droppings. 'It couldn't be more different from Venice!' It was an icy cold afternoon in late November and the wind searing down the valley from Blea Tarn laced the tops in the first snow fall of the year.

'Let's get inside,' Jude said, seeing Rose shiver in her fashionable winter coat that was useless outside London. They went into the huge sitting room, dominated by a blazing log fire that smelt of pine cones.

'Oh, Jude, this is fabulous,' Rose cried, as she gazed around the room, painted a warm cream and decorated with a riot of pictures, carvings, sculptures and paintings, all reflecting Jude's past life and travels. The huge navy blue sofas on each side of the fire were decorated with moons and stars, and curled up in a basket was Jude's new collie puppy, Shap. On a low table in front of the fire there were plates of buttered scones, dropped scones and a Dundee cake.

'All home-made,' Jude said. 'I love cooking and eating these

days,' she added, as she stacked Rose's plate. 'You need a million calories inside you to get up and down these fells.'

Rose gazed out of the window at the high snowy tops and said, 'Belive me, I'd need oxygen.'

After a huge tea Jude lent Rose an Aran jumper, jeans, Barbour and scarf, then they set off together for Shepherd's Crag. By the time they reached it Rose very nearly did need oxygen.

'You only speak when you really have to up here,' Jude yelled as they huddled behind a rock, with the wind snatching the breath from their lips. Rose nodded.

'I've only got one thing to say,' she yelled back. 'The book's great.' Laughing they descended into the dense woods above the Lodore Falls, where at least they could hear themselves speak.

'It's totally different from the last, which is good,' Rose said as they followed the course of a tumbling waterfall. 'You're not repeating yourself. It's very masculine too, a new tone – tough. I like it very much.'

They talked excitedly about the book all the way back up the track to Tarn Cottage where they had a hot bath then prepared supper. Jude had invited Dan to join them, and the minute he walked in and shook Rose's hand Jude knew she was totally superfluous. Busy in the kitchen, roasting a rack of lamb, she listened to Rose and Dan talk, talk, talk about books. Dan was wonderful. Unpretentious and unbiased, he had a fresh approach to everything, added to which he was so dazzlingly handsome he knocked the urbane Rose sideways. She was pink with delight and excitement, and hardly took her eyes off him all evening. When he left, waving to them as he stepped into the wild starry night, Rose leant against the door and said, 'My God, Jude. He is fabulous.'

The next day Rose was up at dawn, ready for a day on the fells.

'It'll kill you,' Jude warned her.

'Your brother's worth dying for,' she answered, zipping up her Barbour with a determined swish.

As the days passed the two became inseparable and when Dan asked Jude if he could stay the night with Rose, she gladly gave them her wonderful bedroom and settled down in the spare room. Rose had to be virtually dragged back to London, but left looking more beautiful than Jude had ever seen her, with the contract for *Rich Man* signed and sealed in her briefcase.

'I'll be back soon,' she promised, as she unwound her arms from around Dan's neck. But she wasn't. The snow set in early that year and the Borrowdale valley was sealed off for the whole of December.

The last batch of mail to get through contained a Christmas card and letter from Claudia.

I interviewed Jonathan last week and he was fabulous. Handsome, contentious, bright and awash with great ideas. We talked about you afterwards, got pissed actually, and wept in each other's arms. He sent you love, by the way. P.S. He split up with his wife months ago. I was wrong, again. Maybe having more between the legs and less between the ears wasn't such a good thing after all.

Jude put Claudia's card in the centre of the fireplace. It turned out to be the only one she got that year.

As December set in, so did the snow, in deep drifts that almost buried the whole of Jude's gable wall. They cut tracks through the compacted snow, from the farmhouse to the byre and down the lane to the tarn. Dan even cut a path across the hillside so Jude could come and go from her cottage to the farmhouse with relative ease. It was strange to be so isolated from the Christmas hype which reached a point of ranting hysteria on the television that year. Up on the fells Watendlath slept in a serene white peace. No presents could be bought, no turkeys, paper hats or crackers. It was the

simplest Christmas Jude had ever spent. Simple in its fare, its message of love and peace, and the profound pleasure of being close to the ones she loved most.

For all the discomfort and inconvenience the weather brought, particularly among the young ewes who were lambing early, the snow was spectacularly beautiful. It was a pure white world where sound was muted to the cry of a buzzard flying low over the sparkling fells, the bleat of a sheep, the start of a hare and the skid of wild ducks crash-landing on the frozen tarn. On Christmas morning Jude made her way along the path, through the banks of high snow, to the family house. Her arms were full of home-made presents, all constructed from things she'd found and put together with thought and care. A picture frame for her mother, which she'd painstakingly painted around the edges, with a photograph of her and Dan inside; a tobacco pouch for her dad which she'd embroidered with his initials; and a bottle of Laphraoig for Dan plus a photograph of Rose in Venice. Jude also brought three bottles of champagne to go with dinner. She'd wrapped it all up in pretty paper, decorated with ribbon and strands of ivy, and put everything carefully in her shopping bag, which she clutched tightly as she slithered along the icy path, excited as a child. The farmhouse was hot and fragrant with the smell of roasting capons, sage and onions, and boiling Christmas puddings.

'Where on earth did you get the chickens from?' Jude asked as she opened the Aga door and sniffed the succulent birds.

'I walked over to Thirlmere for them,' her dad proudly announced.

'Thirlmere?' she gasped. 'Dad, that's miles over the tops.'

'Aye, but it was a nice walk. The valley's completely clear on the other side. I could see cars and buses running up the road to Threlkeld.'

'Don't tell that to Rose,' Dan joked, as he popped open the champagne. 'Or she'll get the train to Ambleside and walk over the tops in her high heels.'

They ate lunch with all the neighbouring families who'd managed to make it through the snow, then gathered in the parlour where Dan played the old piano and they sang carols at the tops of their voices.

'It's been a perfect day,' Jude said as she kissed her parents good night. 'The best ever.'

She walked home through the sparkling starry night with a soft powdery snow falling about her. A fox stopped in its tracks as he heard her, then slunk away into the darkness. A screech owl hooted from the woods under the shadow of Black Waugh and its mate answered from the coppice just beside Jude's cottage.

She rekindled her fire when she got in and put the kettle on for tea. She was full of food, happy and contented, and it would have been easy to curl up on the sofa with her new puppy and watch the old Bogart film on the television. But energy burned in Jude and her fingers itched to write. She put on a CD of *the Marriage of Figaro*, took up her pad and pencil and was just about to start the opening paragraph of her book when the phone rang.

'Damn,' she muttered as she picked it up.

'Merry Christmas, Jude. I'm basting my turkey here in New York and thinking of you.'

'Claude! Merry Christmas.'

'Are you having fun?' she asked.

'It's been a lovely day,' Jude answered. 'The valley's completely snowed up so we've been alone up here, but nobody minded.'

'What, no visitors?'

'No, they'd have to be air-lifted in.'

They talked for a while then Claudia had to go. 'Happy New Year, Jude,' she said. 'I hope it's the best ever.'

Jude put down the phone and stared into the fire, now crackling cheerfully in the hearth. A New Year lay ahead of her, but what of the old? Tears pricked her eyes. She lay back and listened to the strains of Mozart, remembering. It

was almost a year to the day since she'd miscarried. A bitter, hard year of love and loss. First the baby, then David and oddly enough Lucius, but she'd found Gabriele, and Claudia again, and her family whom she'd neglected for years. She had a new home, a new life and a new book just waiting to be written. She'd been blessed indeed.

Stretching herself, Jude sat up and started to work, occasionally stopping to nibble her pencil, or stare into the glowing fire. Footsteps outside the window, followed by a tap at the door made her smile. It would be Dan, come to check she'd got home all right and coax a glass of whisky out of her while he sat and talked about Rose. Laughing to herself, she swung open the front door and stifled a scream.

There in front of her was a man in a long dark overcoat, completely covered from top to toe in snow. As he stiffly unwound the scarf from around his neck and head, Jude could see his eyebrows and eyelids were thick with ice, and his pale skin was stiff, like a mask. Apart from the fact that he was standing upright, the only thing that showed he was alive were his eyes. Dark, brown and brooding, they bored into hers and suddenly her legs gave way.

'Jonathan!'

Time and place ceased to exist as she clutched the door and stared at him, tears streaming down her face. She knew with absolute conviction that Claudia had sent him to her. It was the ultimate act of kindness, a gift of pure, unselfish love.

'Jonathan?'

He tried to touch her but his fingers were frozen stiff and white. He tried to move but swayed like a felled tree. Seeing his condition brought Jude swiftly to her senses. She grabbed him before he fell over and led him towards the sofa, where he all but collapsed.

'You're frozen to the bone,' she cried, unwinding the scarf and removing the sodden coat from his back. She stoked up the fire and dashed into the kitchen where she made a pot of tea and found a large bottle of brandy. She forced the spirit

between his lips and put a mug of hot sweet tea between his hands. 'Drink,' she urged as she rubbed his icy cold feet. 'Oh, my darling, you could have died out there.' She lay beside him, pressing her warm body into his, feeding him tea and brandy alternately. Suddenly the heat hit and he reached out for her.

'Jude,' he croaked, his voice harsh and rasping. 'Oh, Jude . . .'

Wrapping his arms about her, he buried his head in her hair, kissed her breasts, opened her mouth with his tongue.

'My love, my darling, my life.'

Clinging on to him, beyond words, Jude moved on an old instinct. Kissing him, she opened his shirt and laid her head against his heart. Her hands roamed across his chest and down his rib cage. Laying him flat, she removed his clothes and threw hers on to the floor. With the fire gilding her body and her hair flaming around her face, Jude was like a primeval spirit. Mounting Jonathan, she moved gently, quickening the life in him as she skimmed her full, soft breasts over his belly and down to his open thighs where his cock grew big and firm. He pulled her on to him, kissing her harshly, crushing her to him as he thrust into her and smothered his cries of ecstasy in her tumbling, fragrant hair. They moved together, pulling apart to stare at each other in dazed disbelief, and when they came they paused before a great cry of happiness rang out into the dark night. As they lay, clasped tight against each other, the glowing firelight casting shadows up and down their bodies, Jonanthan whispered, 'Jude.'

She looked up into his face, warm and glowing with love.

'Yes?'

'I'm never, *ever*, going away again.'

She smiled and reached up to kiss the mouth she knew and loved best in the world. They'd come home and the love that had lit up their lives throughout the years of pain and separation had finally triumphed. This was forever and for keeps.

As the snow drifted around Watendlath, shrouding the fells in a heavy white silence, Jude slipped into a new life with Jonathan, one that she was destined for long, long ago.

SUCCESS

It's a rainy spring afternoon on a windswept moor when Jude Summers – bright, beautiful and brokenhearted – meets David, the academic who offers her a loving haven from emotional turmoil. David's world is one of Cambridge colleges, Venetian palaces and the glitterati of London's media circle. Jude is no outsider, though. She settles in happily and quickly finds a role of her own.

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